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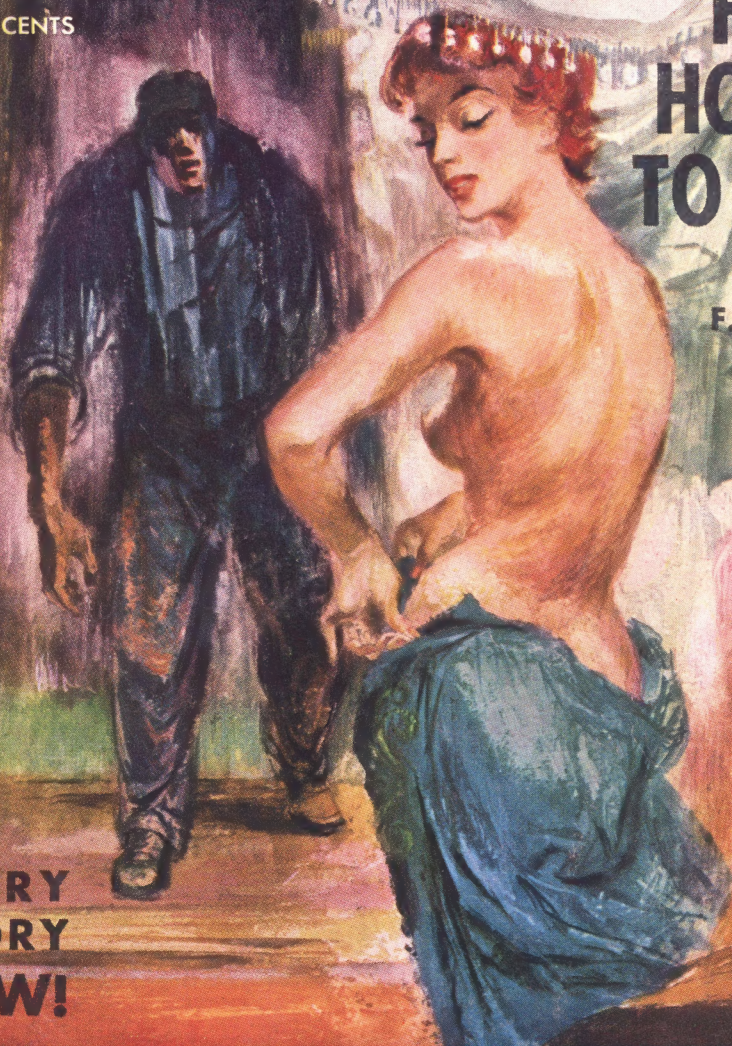
WORLD'S BEST SELLING CRIME-FICTION MAGAZINE

NOVEMBER, 1956

35 CENTS

FOUR HOURS TO KILL

By
F. J. Smith



EVERY
STORY
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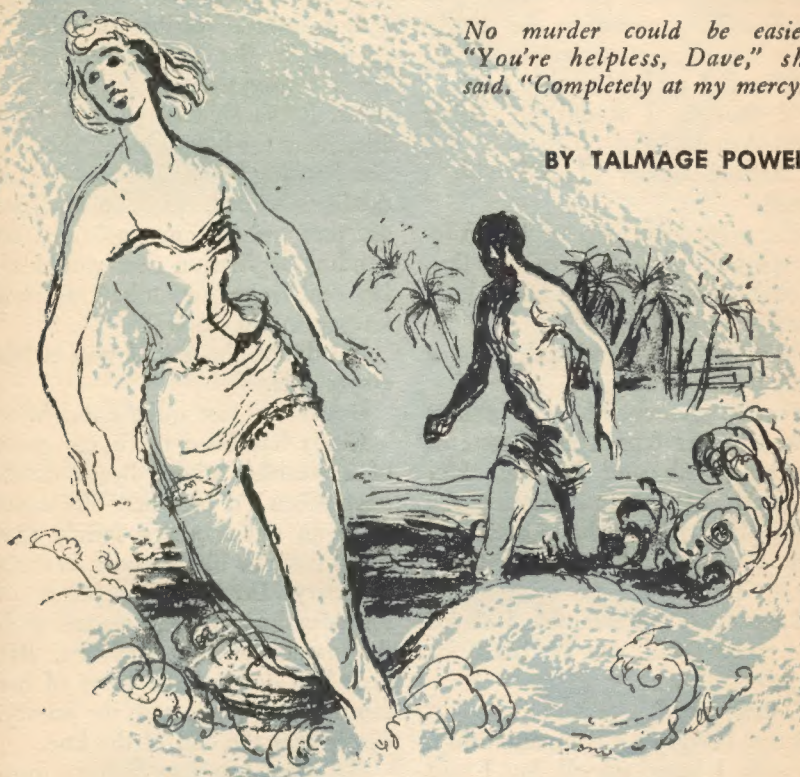
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MANHUNT VOLUME 4, NUMBER 11, November 1956. Single copies 35 cents. Subscriptions, \$4.00 for one year in the United States and Possessions; elsewhere \$5.00 (in U. S. funds) for one year. Published monthly by Flying Eagle Publications, Inc., 545 Fifth Avenue, New York 17, N. Y. Telephone MU 7-6623. Entered as Second Class matter at the Post Office, New York, N. Y. Additional entry at Concord, N. H. The entire contents of this issue are copyrighted 1956 by Flying Eagle Publications, Inc., under the International Copyright Convention. All rights reserved under Inter-American Copyright Convention. Title registered U. S. Pat. Office. Reproduction or use, without express permission, of editorial or pictorial content in any manner is prohibited. Postage must accompany manuscripts and drawings if return is desired, but no responsibility will be assumed for unsolicited materials. Manuscripts and art work should be sent to Manhunt, 545 Fifth Avenue, New York 17, N. Y. No similarity between any of the names, characters, persons and/or institutions appearing in this magazine and those of any living or dead person or institution is intended and any similarity which may exist is purely coincidental. Printed in U. S. A.

Pigeon in an Iron Lung

*No murder could be easier.
"You're helpless, Dave," she
said. "Completely at my mercy."*

BY TALMAGE POWELL



I LAY in the iron lung listening for some sound of her. The lung chuffed softly with that steady rhythm that meant breath and life for me.

The door of the room opened and I saw her in the tilted, curved mirror that was attached to the lung over my face. She stood motionless for a moment, lithe, tanned,

tall, beautiful in white shorts and halter, a yachting cap cocked to one side on her close-cut blonde hair.

I caught the dark thing in her face and eyes. It was there only a moment. Then she was crossing the room, smiling, as only she

could smile, with her full red lips and perfect white teeth.

"How do you feel, darling?" she asked. She had a soft, liquid southern accent that made you think of lazy water in the depths of a hot, mysterious bayou.

"Fine," I said. "Going out?"

"I thought I would go sailing with Arnold."

"Arnold again?" I said with a laugh.

She kissed the tip of her forefinger and pressed it to my lips. "Don't fret, Dave. I have little enough to do here."

"I won't fret, Cindy. I'm just a trifle narrow-minded."

For a moment, it was almost naked in her face. Her distaste of anything sick and helpless. Her boredom. Her realization that she could do anything she pleased and that I couldn't do a damn thing about it.

I felt tired and drained. I closed my eyes. "Will you be back for dinner?"

"I think so."

I was hungry for companionship, for talk. I hated myself, but I said it, "Why not bring Arnold?"

"You mean that, Dave?"

"Certainly. If he's your friend, why shouldn't he be mine?"

"I'll see if it can be arranged," she said. She turned and went out.

I lay there thinking about my wife, about us. The road I'd travelled had started in the slums of Chicago. A tough kid with a lot

of ambition and money hunger. And a yen to be respectable. I had fought my way to the top of a labor organization and put a couple of politicians in my back pocket. I had a sharp instinct for putting money in the right investments. As a consequence, I had made a mint. It wasn't enough. I had hit Florida at the beginning of the post war housing boom. The money had doubled, tripled, quadrupled. State senators asked my opinion on pending legislation that would affect real estate. I even had my own lawyer in the capital.

No doubt about it, I was at last respectable.

But it was not quite enough.

Cindy had been the house guest of a wealthy Miami Beach developer when I'd met her. She came from an old southern family that could trace its lineage back to revolutionary times. The pages of southern history were dotted with the names of her forebears. But time had decayed the glory of her family and dissipated its money. Cindy was the end of the line.

She spent her time drifting from Miami to Charleston to Bar Harbor. From friend to friend. She was beautiful and decorative and that social background still brought her in contact with people eager to have her as a guest.

She accepted their gifts and favors as a matter of course. Just as she accepted my proposal to marry her. She looked up at me with her

lazy green eyes. "Even if I don't love you, Dave?"

"You're what I've been looking for," I said. "I think we'll make a team. I'll reach you in time."

Her eyes had flashed briefly. "Are you sure anyone will ever reach me, Dave? I warn you, I like myself. I like myself very much."

"I don't exactly hate myself, Cindy. I'm glad we understand each other."

For a wedding present, I gave her the long, sweeping house on Indian Shores Beach. It overlooked a thousand feet of private beach, a boat dock where a cruiser bobbed at anchor, and the limitless stretches of the Gulf of Mexico.

The first few months were okay by me. The terrace and long living room, that gave you the feeling you were living out of doors, was the scene of gay parties where smart people moved and talked.

We danced, swam, fished from the cruiser. Cindy never talked a great deal and the remoteness never completely left her green eyes. One night on the cruiser deck when I was kissing her, I raised my head to find her staring abstractedly at the distant stars.

Then one morning I woke with fever and nausea. I was in my physical prime. But a few days later, I couldn't move. The polio virus had done what the slums had never been able to do. It had put Dave Ramey on his back.

Lying there, with the lung sucking life into me, I tried to clear my mind of its train of thought. I wanted to quit thinking of the way in which Cindy had changed her life after my illness. But I couldn't stop thinking.

Now there was Arnold Barrett. He was the sort, dark and tall, that some women would call a dreamboat. He and Cindy had met a week ago. He lived in a cottage down the beach. They were seeing each other constantly, and a foreboding of disaster grew stronger in me each day. Arnold had nothing, except his good looks. While Cindy had a helpless hulk of a husband who was kept alive by mechanical means.

"Miss Collins!"

The short, stout, middle-aged woman who was my private nurse came in from the adjoining room. "Yes, Mr. Ramey?"

"I'd like to go out on the terrace please."

She turned the lung on its big rubber casters and rolled me out on the long, screened terrace.

"Turn me so I can see the water, Miss Collins."

She turned the lung and adjusted the mirror. "Anything else, Mr. Ramey?"

"No, that'll be all."

"Yes, sir. By the way, Mr. Ramey, Mrs. Ramey said I might have the evening off."

"Oh?"

"Yes. She said she would be

here with you. Of course, if you prefer..."

"No," I said. "That's all right, Miss Collins."

"Thank you, sir."

She settled on a chaise longue at the far side of the terrace, picked up a book, and started reading.

I lay on my back, looking into the mirror. Its curvature gave me a broad view. The Gulf was beautiful today, green as an emerald. A light breeze, right for pleasant sailing, rippled little mare's tails across the water.

I saw the rented sailboat as it hove into view. Arnold was at the helm and Cindy was forward. Distance made them smaller than doll creatures in the mirror. But imagination could magnify them. Could bring to life the lazy ripple of water against the boat. The stir of the semi-tropical breeze with its tang of salt and its heat. The image of her standing on the prow, a tall, golden figurehead. Especially desirable, because she lingered just beyond reach.

Lips parted, she gazed into the reaches of open sky and water. Undoubtedly thinking of the sickening wreck who had once been her husband, but who now was nothing more than an obstacle between her and freedom.

The signs were there. I had observed them for days now. But I had to know. I had to make sure. I must be positive that the sickness of my body was not now becoming

a sickness of the mind as well.

Arnold tried to tack, lost headway. The sails flapped. She went back to help him, moving along the boat with feline grace.

The boat got underway and moved beyond the view line of the mirror.

"Miss Collins."

"Yes, Mr. Ramey?"

"Bring me a phone, please."

The nurse got up, with a rustle of her crisp nylon uniform. She left the terrace and returned with a phone. She plugged it in, set its special cradle on the small platform beside my head, and put the phone on the cradle. By turning my head, I had the phone in position.

She dialed a delicatessen for me and I ordered a dinner to be delivered that night. Roast chicken, oyster dressing, a good selection of relishes and wine.

Miss Collins took the phone away and I slept.

When I awoke, I knew I had been having a nightmare. I couldn't remember the dream, but its effects lingered. I was sweating, my mind upset with the turbulence of anxiety.

It was late afternoon and Miss Collins still sat near me, reading. I became calmer and asked her for a cigarette.

I had finished the cigarette when I heard their voices. Cindy's and Arnold's. He was laughing at something she had said. He had a big, deep, easy laugh. It fitted his

dark good looks. It caressed a woman with the right shade of intimacy.

They came onto the terrace, warmed by the sun, healthy, alive. They came walking into the soft chug-chug of the lung and Arnold wasn't laughing.

"Hello, Dave."

"How was the sail, Arnold?"

"Oh, fine. Your missus — she really knows boats."

"She knows a lot about a lot of things, Arnold."

Cindy glanced at me. "Yes, don't I, darling?"

I gave her a smile. "I understand you told Collins she could take the evening off."

For an instant, it was there between them. She returned my smile coolly. Arnold let his head swing around, his gaze search the Gulf's expanse.

"You don't mind do you, Dave?" Cindy said.

"Of course not. You're familiar with the workings of the lung. It won't be the first time Collins has had a few hours to herself."

"That's right. She's only been off twice in the past two weeks, hasn't she? She really deserves it."

"Why not let her go on now?" I asked. "I've already arranged to have dinner sent from Max's. Arnold will stay, of course."

They couldn't keep from flicking a brief glance at each other. I was playing into their hands and I could sense that it was working

even better than Cindy'd hoped.

"Well, I was supposed to..." Arnold began. Then he reached a decision. "I'd enjoy staying, Dave."

"Good. Why don't you mix a drink while Collins gets ready to go? Then you could drop her at the bus stop, if she's planning an evening in town."

"Where else would I plan an evening?" Miss Collins said.

She left the terrace. Arnold made drinks. Cindy brought mine to me, put the bent glass straw between my lips. I took a sip. Arnold mixed a very good martini.

Miss Collins was ready to go in a few minutes. I heard the car leaving the driveway. My car. Arnold driving it. What was he thinking as he drove? That it was a nice handling job?

Cindy was on her third drink. I watched her in the mirror.

"I hope it will be painless," I said.

"Painless?"

"The killing," I said.

She moved around until she was standing just to one side and over me, looking down into my face. There was no emotion in her eyes. But in the soft gold column of her throat a tiny pulse beat. Another pulse showed in the soft hollow of tanned flesh below the white halter.

"What are you talking about, Dave?" she said softly.

"All my life I've dealt with people, Cindy. I know them pretty well. You don't have to draw me

a map. It was okay for awhile, wasn't it?"

She stood for a long time without speaking. The surf murmured in the near distance and the lung beat softly. Like a heart that would never stop. I knew she was listening to it.

"Yes, Dave, it was fine when you were on your feet."

"But everything is different now."

"You're more dead than alive," she said without inflection. "I've wondered — knowing you — don't you want to die?"

"No, Cindy. And that shows how little you really know me. Life in the lung isn't too bad. With assistance I read, play cards. I do a certain amount of business by telephone. I watch television — second-hand from the mirror. I enjoy the breeze on the terrace here and I like the feeling that I started with nothing and built this house. What man has more, Cindy?"

"Except a wife, Dave."

"I've never had you."

"Yes, you did. For awhile. As much of me as I was able to give."

"Now I have none of you."

"That's the hard, cold fact of life, Dave. You have to accept these things."

"Without shame, remorse, guilt, any feeling?"

She shrugged. "You started this conversation. What are those things?"

"You wouldn't know, would you, Cindy?"

"I didn't want to talk about it, remember."

"But I do. Now there is Arnold. There is freedom, just over the horizon, and barrels of money. Nothing at all in your way, except a man more dead than alive. Did you plan it for tonight?"

"Do you really want to know?" she said. A faint glow had come to her eyes. She looked more alive now than she had in days.

"I guess not. How will it happen? A little accident, a cotter pin or some little something going wrong with the lung?"

"No one could ever blame me, Dave."

"They might suspect."

"Who cares? Suspecting and proving are two different things."

"I might tell someone what you're planning."

"But there's no one here but us, darling."

"There's the phone."

"And who's to plug it in for you? I'm afraid, Dave, there's another hard, cold fact you'll have to face up to. There's nothing you can do. You can't move; you can't even breathe without that thing doing it for you. You're helpless, Dave, completely at my mercy."

"I see," I said. "One thing I insist on — that the killing be painless."

"I'm really sorry, Dave, that you had to come down with this thing. I liked you — as a whole man. I saw your courage when this thing

struck. Now I see how deep that courage really is."

She drained her glass, looked at me over the rim of it and smiled. "I'll always remember how brave you were, darling."

She fed me that evening, sitting close to me, arranging my after dinner coffee so I could sip it with a straw. Arnold was silent during most of the meal.

When dinner was over, I caught his eye. "This has been pretty drab, I'm afraid. Why don't you two go for a swim?"

"Well, I..." Arnold said.

"I insist," I said. "Turn on the television for me and enjoy yourselves. Later, we'll have drinks."

"Why not?" Cindy said. "It's still early. I feel like rolling in the surf. I want to feel the pull and tug of the tide. Come on, Arnold. Dave will be right here when we get back."

"That's a certain bet," I said. "Arnold you can borrow a pair of my trunks. Cindy'll get them for you."

I heard them leave the room. Alone now. The lung and I. The metal casing that served for a body. The cell that made me helpless.

I pictured them walking into the surf together. Arnold big and handsome and she lithe and slim.

The plunge into the water. His laughter. The roll of their bodies as they swam together in the moonlight. I wouldn't think beyond their swimming together.

An hour passed.

I heard the door open and close. Arnold entered the room alone. He walked over and turned down the sound on the television set.

"It's all over, Dave. It'll look like an accident. They'll find her body with the early change of tide tomorrow. I checked the currents the way you instructed."

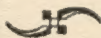
"You were always a good strong-arm man, Arnold."

"Thanks," he said. "Just like old times in Chicago, eh, Dave?"

"Just like old times. I'm glad you came down when you got my call. The money'll reach you by special messenger after you get back to Chi, Arnold, and the whole thing dies down. Fifty grand of it."

"Fair enough," Arnold said. "Now I think I'll have a drink."

He turned toward the liquor cabinet across the room. He was an efficient man in his job. I knew he had made it as painless for her as possible. I was glad she hadn't suffered. I had insisted the killing be as painless as Arnold could make it. Only a brute would have wanted her to suffer needlessly.



Who's Calling?

BY ROBERT TURNER

THE telephone call came about five-thirty that afternoon. Breen was in the Florida room, watching a cowboy movie on TV and relaxing with a Scotch-on-rocks. His wife, Beth, was in the bathroom showering after an afternoon of working in the yard.

Breen shouted: "I'll get it, honey!" and got up and turned down the volume on the TV set.

"Don't answer it! Hear me? Stay away from that damn phone!"



When he picked up the telephone an operator's voice said. "New York calling a Mister James W. Binford, please." She spoke so distinctly it was impossible to misunderstand.

Breen dropped the drink he had carried with him. The heavy Old Fashioned glass struck his stockinged foot and the icy liquid soaked the bottom of his trousers, but he didn't notice. For a moment he kept working his mouth, but he didn't answer.

"Hello? Hello, sir?" the operator said.

"I — beg your pardon," Breen said, finally. "I'm afraid I didn't understand you."

"I have a call from New York for Mister James W. Binford," she repeated. "Is this Mr. Binford?"

He almost shouted it: "No! It is not."

"Well, is he *there*, sir?"

"No," Breen said. "There's — nobody by that name at this number. You've got the wrong number."

"Is this Beach 541-172, sir?"

"Yes," he said. "But there's some mistake. There's no Binford, nobody with a name anything like that, here. You have the wrong number, I tell you."

"One moment, sir."

Breen listened to the voice of the operator talking to somebody at the other end. He could hear a man's voice, but he couldn't tell what was being said. The operator came back.

"My party is sure there is no mistake, sir," she said. "Perhaps you didn't hear the name correctly. I'll repeat it for you. We wish to speak to a mister James W. Bin——"

"Operator!" He spaced the words with vicious deliberation. "There — is — nobody — nobody — nobody — by — that — name — here. Do you understand? Please don't ring this line again." He hung up. He stood without moving, the tips of his fingers still touching the phone.

"Who was it, Jay?" Beth came into the room. She wore a towel turbaned about her head and another sarong-like around her fine young body. Drops of water were jewelled on her shoulders and long, clean lined thighs. Even without makeup her face was quietly lovely; just far enough removed from the classic mold to make it refreshingly attractive.

"Jay!" she said almost peevishly, now. "I said, who was it? Who just called?"

When he didn't answer, she looked down at the empty glass on the floor, the dark, wet stain on the rug. "You've dropped your drink, dodo. Jay!"

He sat down on the sofa next to the telephone table as though he didn't know the sofa were there; as though he would have collapsed to the floor if it hadn't been.

"I don't know who it was, Beth. I don't know." His fleshily handsome face looked moist, doughy, but there was no sweat on it. He

was wearing slacks, but no shirt. His soft, hairy chest and stomach moved up and down as though he'd just run for miles.

"What do you mean?" Beth said. "Was it a wrong number? What did they want?"

Still not looking at her, he said: "It was — nothing. Yes. Yes, it was a wrong number. That's what it was."

She moved around in front of him. The tips of her fingers eased his head back. No longer querulous, her voice was now worriedly gentle. "Jay, don't give me that. Something's wrong. What is it, now? Maybe I can help."

His eyes stayed on hers for a long time. Then his chin went back onto his chest. "They asked for — it was a call from New York," he said. "They wanted James Binford."

She backed away from him. She edged a thumbnail under her upper teeth. The teeth were tiny and even and white. "Oh, no, Jay!" she said. "That's preposterous. Nobody knows you by that name. Who *was* it?"

He made a savage gesture. "How the hell do I know?" he shouted. "You think I acknowledged that was my real name? You think I waited to find out who it was? For God's sake, shut up and let me think."

She went to the portable bar and fixed two drinks. She took one to her husband and downed the other straight. She watched her husband

down his. Then she said sternly:

"Get hold of yourself, Jay. Don't let's get panicky after five years. Don't forget I'm in this, too."

"Not the way I am," he said. "You didn't kill any one."

"Listen," she said. "Look at it this way. A man named Binford *did* embezzle ninety thousand from Metro Savings And Loan in New York and killed the accountant who caught him, in order to have time to get away. But this Binford went to Mexico or South America, they think. Nobody knows. But all this has nothing to do with us — with you. Don't you see? What do we have to do with him? Nothing."

"Somebody *knows* that's who I am, though. They —"

"Wait a minute. You just think that. You're Jay Breen, retired insurance broker from Des Moines. You lived and were in business there for twenty years. You've got papers to prove that. You're known and respected here in Florida — as Jay Breen. Jay, what's the matter with you? Nobody could possibly — it must've been some similar name. You didn't hear what you thought you did. You couldn't."

He got up and walked over to the bar and poured another drink. "Beth, I know what I heard," he said. "She repeated it. She *kept* repeating it, the operator. I couldn't possibly have misunderstood."

"But it doesn't make sense. Who would make a call like that?"

"I don't know," he said. "But somebody did."

"Not the police. They'd be down here. Or the F.B.I. It would be insane for them to do something like that."

"I know," he said.

"Then, *who*, Jay? Come on, honey. Simmer down. Something made you edgy today, reminded you of the past or something. So you were hearing things just now. It has to be."

When he didn't answer, she turned and started out of the room. "I'm going to get dressed. Have another drink and get in and shower. It'll make you feel better. You'll have to hurry it, though. We're due at the Hopkins' in an hour."

"Didn't MacCreary have a son, Beth?"

"Who?"

"Don't tell me you've forgotten that accountant—MacCreary? Anyhow, he had a couple of kids. One of them was a boy about fourteen, I remember. That kid would be nineteen, now. It could have been him."

"Oh, my God, Jay," she said. "How melodramatic can you get? For five years the boy has been sherlocking around the country instead of going to school and finally he's sniffed us out. So he goes back to New York and sets out on a psychological torture project, making long distance phone calls..." Her laughter broke it off.

"Don't laugh," he said. "Some people do go off the deep end for revenge. It could even be the wife, using private investigators or something. *You* can be cool and flippant about it, Beth. You didn't *get* the damn call. You didn't *hear* it."

"I wish I had," she said, walking out of the room. "I would have got the name straight."

From the bedroom a moment later, she called out: "All right, let's pack and run like frightened rabbits. After five years of keeping cool and sitting tight and setting things up perfectly. *Now* we get panicked over a silly wrong number or something, a similar sounding name. Okay? That make you happy?"

He didn't answer. He had one more drink and then went into the bathroom to take his shower.

That night when they got home from an evening of cards and small talk at their neighbors', there was a telegram under the front door. Breen's fingers trembled so badly Beth had to take the envelope and open it. It said:

Next Time I Call You On The Phone, Don't Be So High Hat. Talk To Me.

It was addressed to James W. Binford at the Breen's address. It was datelined New York, several hours before. It was signed, *Mac*.

When Jay read it, Beth said: "You win. You were right. Somebody's got us tabbed, Jay. What are we going to do?"

They took a bottle of Scotch out to the kitchen and sat there, drinking and talking it over. Breen kept saying: "Mac. Mac. What the hell? It *must* be somebody in the family, MacCreary's family. It's got to be." He proceeded after awhile to get quite drunk. Beth finally helped him to bed.

The next morning, over coffee, she said: "Jay, I've thought it all through. I know what it is. It's the F.B.I. or Metro's insurance company, one. But they're not *sure*. They only suspect. I don't know how they tumbled, got this close, but that's got to be it. If it gets us down, if it breaks us, then they'll *know* they're right, *then* they'll move in."

He washed down aspirin with tomato juice and stared at her with bloodshot eyes. He looked ten years older this morning. After awhile he nodded.

"All right. So what do we do?"

"Act natural, normal. We don't let it get us. This morning we take the telegram back to Western Union and tell them we opened it by mistake, without looking at the name; there's nobody by that name at our address. If you get any more calls, complain to the telephone company. We'll act outraged, indignant at the annoyance. We've got to carry this off, Jay. They're very unsure and really don't have much to work on or they wouldn't be doing it in this wild way."

"Maybe," he said. "We can't run,

that's sure. Almost every cent we had left is invested in that stupid roadhouse. You and your smart ideas. If we had that cash, now, we could take off and—"

"And have them on our necks before we'd gone a mile. Innocent people don't run, Jay. Even if they didn't catch us, how long would that measley fifteen thousand have lasted? This way, when this thing blows over, we'll have big money coming in from the investment."

"If it blows over," Breen said.

Later, they took the telegram back to Western Union. There were no more incidents that day, no more telephone calls. Down-town, Beth shopped and her husband visited the offices of his business partners. Everything was the same as usual.

That night they were both in a better mood, almost relaxed again, and they hardly thought or talked about the phone call and the telegram. Just before they went to sleep, Breen said:

"You're a real brain, darling. You had it figured. And we've thrown them off. They think if we'd been guilty, it would have gotten us and we'd have made a move by now. But they really had me sweating."

"Me, too, hon," she answered sleepily. "Good night, now."

The next afternoon at five o'clock there was another call. This one was local. A man's voice, muffled, disguised, said: "Mr. Binford? Mr. James W. Binford, I presume. How

you feeling now, Mr. Binford?"

Breen's voice was thick with rage and terror: "You've got the wrong number." He slammed the receiver down.

When he looked up at Beth, his eyes were rolling in his white, sagging, middle-aged face. Damp stains began to darken his sport shirt. He said: "Right here. Right here in town. That's why we didn't hear anything yesterday. They were on the way down here." His voice broke. "What are we going to *do*?"

The phone rang again and Breen flung himself across the sofa away from it. He said: "Yank the thing out of the wall. We've got to stop this. I won't have it. Beth, make them stop it, stop it."

"Jay, *please* get hold of yourself!"

He watched her lift the receiver as though she was picking up a coral snake. Without saying anything, she stood there listening. The man's muffled words became audible in the room.

"Jim!" he said. "Come on, now, Jim, this is silly. You've got to talk to me. You know you have... Jim? Jim Binford? ... Hello?"

Very carefully Beth Breen pushed her finger down to break the connection. Then before the phone could ring again, she dialed the operator, asked for the Business Office.

"Some ridiculous person is pestering us with repeated calls, asking for a party by some name we've

never even heard of," she said. "They've been told and told they have the wrong number, but they keep calling. Isn't there some way this can be stopped?"

A supervising operator came on and Beth repeated the complaint. Beth was told that it was difficult to trace calls on a dial system, but they would do their best to try to prevent any further annoyance.

Neither Breen nor his wife ate dinner that evening. The phone rang four more times, at fifteen minute intervals. They didn't answer it. Beth finally wrapped a thick wadding of rags around the bell box and then shut the sliding doors that cut the Florida room off from the rest of the house.

The next morning there was a letter in the mail box addressed to Mr. James W. Binford. There was no return address. Breen started to rip it open, but Beth snatched it away and hurried inside the house.

"Don't be an idiot," she told him. "That's what they're looking for — some slight acknowledgement that you are Binford."

Breen, haggard and veiny-eyed from lack of sleep, watched in stupefied numbness as Beth grabbed a pencil, crossed out their address on the envelope and scrawled across the face of the envelope: *Not Known At This Address.*

"We'll put this back in a mailbox downtown, when we go," she said.

He was no longer interested in the letter, however. He got up from

the table, moving like a sleep walker and started out of the room.

"Where are you going?" she asked.

When he didn't answer, she followed him into the Florida room. She watched him take the rags from around the bell box of the telephone. He looked up at her, sheepishly. His face was gray, the even features almost idiotically lax.

"I've got to know," he said. "I'll go nuts if I don't know. I've got to know if it rings again, if he's going to call again."

Beth thought about the joke concerning the man waiting for the other shoe to be dropped upstairs and had to fight back an impulse to laugh hysterically.

There were no calls that morning. After lunch, which Breen didn't touch, Beth took him by the shoulders and shook him. He was limp as a child in her grip. His eyes stared past her while she spoke.

"Jay, you've got to sweat this out with me. You can't let them break you, let me down, darling. It *can't* last much longer. They'll have to give up soon, if we don't let them get us hot and bothered any more."

"Can't it?" he said, softly. "Will they?"

"You've got to get some rest, Jay. That'll help. This afternoon we'll go to the doctor's and get you a prescription for some nembital."

He didn't argue against that; he didn't answer at all.

On the way back from the doc-

tor's office, Breen swore that a car was following them, had been all the way, even though it turned off onto another street just before they got home. He didn't get too excited about it, though. It were almost as if he considered it something inevitable, as if he'd expected it.

When they reached the front door of the house, the phone was ringing inside. Breen grabbed the key from his wife's hand and tremblingly jammed it into the lock and flung open the door. When she tried to restrain him, he shoved her aside. Veins stood out in his throat and at his temples as he plunged into the house.

Beth stood at the doorway of the Florida room and watched him snatch up the phone. She listened to him shout: "Damn you to hell, leave us alone! You're going to stop this, you hear? There's nobody here by that name, nobody, nobody, nobody, nobody...!"

His voice kept saying that one word, but no longer into the mouthpiece of the phone. The instrument lay shattered on the floor, against the wall where he had hurled it with all his strength after yanking out the wire.

After awhile Breen sprawled on the sofa, crying. Beth didn't disturb him. She went into a bedroom and changed into shorts and halter. When she came back to him, Breen was sitting up, with his hands clasped between his knees. He was

staring at the floor. There was some color in his face once more.

"That's better," she said. "That was good for you, that release. You're going to make it with me now, Jay. Take a couple of nem-butal and get into bed."

He arose, shakily. "Yes," he said. "I—I'm going to be all right, I think." He walked over to her and half fell against her. His hands clawed at her shoulder blades, grabbing her against him. He burrowed his feverish face into her neck.

"Beth, Beth!" he whispered. "What would I do without you? I couldn't have gotten through this. You're so strong, Baby. So much stronger than I."

She said: "It's been tougher on you because—well—you're more directly involved. Come on, now. You've got to rest."

He had to have a few drinks first, he insisted. Beth tried to talk him out of it; it might not be a good idea to mix the liquor with the sedative. But he downed three double shots, before he took the capsules. Then he burst out laughing. He reached across the table and put his hand on Beth's shoulder.

"Sure busted hell out of that phone, didn't I?" he said, giggling. "Wonder what he thought when he heard the crash? Well, he can't call us now, can he?"

"No," she said. "Please go to bed, Jay."

"Good ol' Beth," he said, blurrily. He stumbled toward the bedroom. For three hours he lay where he had fallen across the bed, dead to the world.

It was just after dark when he awoke, screaming into the blackness of the bedroom: "Beth, don't answer it! You hear me? Stay away from that damn phone. Don't answer, Beth, don't talk to him. Don't! Don't...!"

She switched the light on and stood looking at him. He was sitting on the edge of the bed, his hair wild, his eyes dull and swollen. His clothes were drenched with perspiration.

"Jay!" she said, sharply.

"The phone was ringing." He shuddered. "Ringing and ringing. I thought I'd go mad. But it's stopped now."

"You were dreaming," she said. "The phone's out of order. You broke it."

He looked at her vacantly, one side of his mouth working. "Oh, no," he said. "It couldn't be. I heard it. Very plainly. You're just saying that, Beth. Trying to kid me."

"No, Jay. Wake up, now. You must be still asleep."

"He isn't going to stop," Breen said. "He's going to keep on and on. I don't think I can take it any more." He stood up. "I'd better put an end to it. I'm going to the police and tell them everything. That'll stop him."

She went white and her face tensed into taut ugliness. She slapped him, swinging hard. The force of it knocked him back onto the bed.

"Don't say that," she told him. "Don't you ever say that. Get it out of your head. What about me? You think I'm going to let you blab me into prison?"

He sat there, holding his face. His eyes cleared a little. He said: "What did I say? Why did you hit me? What did I do?"

When she told him, he shook his head, unbelievably. "I don't even remember," he said. "I must have still been asleep."

She got him out into the kitchen, then. She tried to get him to eat, but he wouldn't touch anything. He only wanted to drink. He finished the bottle he had started earlier. He told Beth:

"The nembutal isn't enough. It doesn't knock me out long enough. I feel like I'm going to fall apart if I don't get a really long, long sleep. I'm going to drink myself into a stupor. Stay with me, Beth. Stay right here with me."

She played solitaire on the kitchen table while he drank his way through half of another bottle. She played game after game. Every once in a while Breen would cock his head in a listening attitude. Then he'd say:

"The ringing. I swear I can still hear it. I know I'm not *really* hearing it, understand? Yet I *am*. And

I can hear *him*, too. I can hear his voice, hear him saying my name over and over, Beth. I tell you I can. Mr. Binford, he says, Binford, Binford, Binford..."

Beth didn't look up from her cards. She kept right on playing.

At ten-thirty, Breen weaved to his feet. He knocked the chair over backward. He waved an arm, loosely. His suetty face was completely slacked, but there was an evasive shrewdness in his red eyes. He mumbled: "No good. Not gettin' anywhere. Got to get some air."

As he moved toward the back door, rolling along one wall, Beth stood up. She said: "Jay, you're not going to the police." It was not a question.

He didn't turn around. He said: "Don't be silly, Hon. Wouldn't do that. Couldn't. Know what they'd do to me. I'm not going to die that way. Too slow. Not that way. Not me, not Jay Binford or James Breen or whatever the hell my name is."

Beth watched him go out the back door and then she sat back down at her cards again.

A few minutes later the motor of their car, out in the driveway, started up. She stood, one hand to her throat. Then the motor roared, gravel squirted and tires squealed. She ran to the window and saw the headlights dip and swing as the car left the driveway and headed down the street. She leaned against the wall, her forehead on

the back of her hand. Her forehead felt burning hot. She thought she was going to be sick for a moment, but she finally fought it off.

She was sitting in the living room, smoking one cigarette after another, two hours later, when the police came. As soon as she saw the uniforms, she knew she'd made a mistake; she should have known what Jay had been up to; she should have run for it. It was several moments before it penetrated that they hadn't come to pick her up; they were trying so hard to break it to her, gradually.

He had hit a concrete bridge abutment on the outskirts of town. The speedometer was jammed at eighty five. He was killed instantly. Would she come down and officially identify the body when she felt up to it?

Later, a highway patrol lieutenant asked her: "Was your husband — well, maybe upset bad about something, Mrs. Breen? Maybe depressed? You know."

"Oh, no." She shook her head. "Not that I know of. His health was good. Of course, he was drinking a little heavily tonight. Why?"

"Well, there were certain indications that he might have — ah — well, deliberately . . . But it doesn't really matter, I suppose. Forget I mentioned it, Mrs. Breen."

One week after the funeral, a car stopped in front of the Breen house. A man came to the door.

He was carrying a salesman's sample kit. He was tall and spare and quite young. His face was big-boned and too thin, yet it was strikingly attractive in a sardonic sort of way.

When Beth Breen answered the door, the salesman said: "Morning, ma'am. I've brought those brushes you ordered."

"Oh, yes," she said. "Come in."

Inside, with the door closed, he dropped the sample case. Beth Breen moved into his arms, clinging to him. He said: "I couldn't wait any longer, Baby. I just couldn't."

"I know," she told him. "It was crazy, telling you to stay away for at least a month. What we'll do now, I'll go away somewhere. It will look all right, I think. I'll make it some out of the way place. You can meet me there. Oh, Harry, Harry, it's all over and it worked beautifully."

He held her away from him. "But what happened with the gun?" he said. "You said it would be that."

"I don't know. I put it in the drawer with his shirts, but whether he just didn't see it or . . . Anyhow, it doesn't matter; it was even better the way it worked out."

"How were the calls?" he said.

"Wonderful. Your timing was perfect. And you were right. It was worth the trip to New York to make the first one from there, long distance, and to send the telegram.

He didn't have a chance after that. It worked fast from then on.

"You're terrific," he said and made a move to take her into his arms. But she drew back.

"Don't look so hurt, dear," she said. "It's just that I don't think we ought to take the chance. Soon, we'll —"

"Baby, it's been a whole month. You know how hard that's been, not seeing you? A whole, damn month."

She came to him, making pitying, comforting sounds; then she was locked hard in his arms again.

"Tonight, just tonight," he whispered pleadingly between the kisses. "No one saw me come. I'll run my car into the garage. Baby. Baby..."

Harry sat on the bed. Breen's pajama's fit him reasonably well. He smoked and spoke to Beth's

image in the dressing table, before which she sat brushing her hair.

"Can't you do some of that in the morning?" Harry said and chuckled. He stood up and started to move towards her, but the bedroom phone suddenly rang and stopped him short. They both stared at the phone. Then they both laughed at the same time.

"God!" Beth Breen said. "For a moment I forgot I'd had it fixed."

Harry's deeply set eyes watched the movement of her body under the powder blue negligee as she went to the phone. He watched her pick it up and heard her say: "Hello?" He saw something terrible happen to her face as she wheeled toward him, then, but he didn't hear the man's voice on the phone say: "Mrs. Binford? Is this Mrs. James W. Binford?..."



Crooked Do-It-Yourself

In Pasadena, Calif., David Cantor, 24 year old engineering student at the California Institute of Technology, reported to police that his sport car had been stolen. Several days later it was found in the basement of the institute's Throop Hall. The car had been dismantled, carried into the building and reassembled.

Lesson Learned

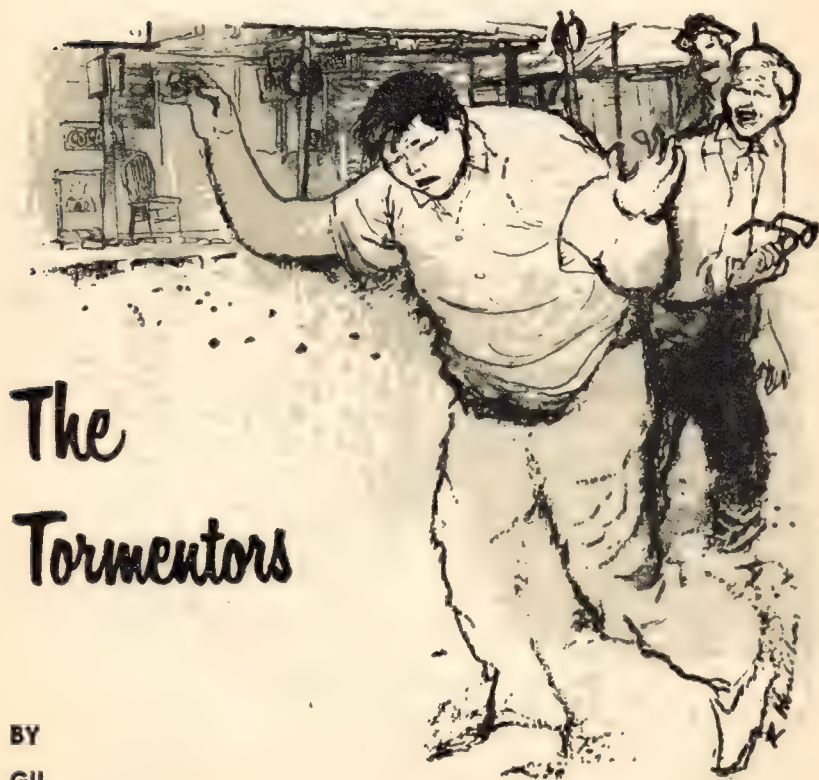
Earl McElrath, of Asheville, N. C., told police that he was robbed at gunpoint of \$7 and his gloves by a hitchhiker. As he left the car, the robber turned toward McElrath and said: "Take my advice, mister, and don't ever pick up a hitchhiker again."

IT WAS mid-morning when he found the knife. It was a pocket fishing knife with a five inch blade. The knife edge was very sharp, honed to smooth moon white, and the back of the blade was a saw. The handle was black pearl, as slick as grease, and wonderful to touch.

It took him a long time to touch it, though.

He stood there on the riverbank, the astonishingly thick lenses of his glasses glinting, watching the knife as though it might take a notion to leap away. Late September sun beamed brightly through the crispy

He was stupid. His name was Beans. He had a sister with a yellow dress. Now the dress was red . . .



The Tormentors

BY
GIL
BREWER

leaves of elm and maple and oak and hickory, and the air was cold in his nostrils and his wrists were blue.

Mine, he thought.

The knife lay on the very edge of the mossy bank above the slow, swirling, gray-black waters of the river, twinkling.

He looked around, his eyes like enormous wet blue agates under the intense magnification of his glasses, and then he stared at the knife again. He knew one thing: it was his knife and nobody must know that he had it, not even Nana. If Nana knew, she would take it away from him, and he would let her because she would kiss him and touch his face and he liked that. More than anything in the whole world, he liked that—the cool soft damp touch of her lips, and the warm, lingering electricity of her dancing fingers.

He wiped his mouth on the ragged sleeve of his orange sweater.

He lumbered through the sunshine, leaned hugely down and picked up the knife, folded it shut and slipped it into his pocket. He kept his hand in his pocket, the knife tight in his fist, smooth and very cold, like a bar of ice.

It was almost the same as when Nana kissed him.

Not quite, though—nothing was ever *quite* like that.

He listened to the deep whisper of the river, breathing the rich smell of the river and the woods and the

damp cold grass. And from the village came the pleasant, lazy odor of burning leaves.

They would be sitting on the porch at the store and he would have to pass by them, hear them shout, yell—scream, even.

It was just a thought, though. He'd mostly forgotten that a few moments before he had passed them, staring patiently at their ridiculous laughter. He wanted to get home and see Nana.

He crashed through the woods, across rotting logs, through shallow water and mud and cat-tails and knee-high grass, and a blackbird flew up in front of him and finally he came up onto the road. He had to crawl under a wire fence and it was difficult because he refused to take his hand out of his pocket.

They were on the steps, sitting, chewing, spitting, laughing—waiting.

He stumbled along the rutted dirt of the road. His feet fumbled and he staggered.

"Hey, Beans"

"There's Beans."

"Beans, get the hell over here. Where you been, Beans?"

"Beans, what you got your hand in your pocket for?"

He came past them, watching them and stopped because one of them said, "Stop, Beans."

"Where's your sister at, Beans? Where's Nana?"

He looked at them.

"Beans, you got eyes like a cock-

eyed owl . . . an owl with glasses."

"Wipe your mouth, Beans."

He wiped his mouth with his sleeve and a long strand of dirty orange yarn unravelled from the sleeve. The strand stuck in his mouth and he spat it out. The cold air bit on his wrist, began to nibble on it like tiny mice. He felt fear, rubbed his wrist against his side. His wrist was blue.

"Beans," one of them said. "Let's hear you live up to your name."

"Leave 'im alone," somebody said.

"Ah, can it."

Beans watched them. There were five of them, leaning and sitting, and lying on the porch. The small, yellow-haired one kept laughing, throwing his head back, gasping for air.

"Listen to Beans!" the yellow-haired one shouted. "Listen at him! Oh, Lord, he busts my gut—honest to Christ, he does."

The small, skinny, yellow-haired one had a slit nostril and he always shouted and yelled and danced around, just like he was doing right now. Beans didn't feel an awful lot of anything, but he did have a yearning to do something about the yellow-haired one, maybe walk on him like Nana told him to walk on the big bugs at night on the floor—walk on the yellow-haired one's face. He kept the bugs in a jar, to watch.

"Beans, where's your sister?"

"She," Beans said. "Nana. Home."

"That's what *you* think," one of

them said. "She ain't home, Beans. We know. She ain't home. She *ain't* home, Beans!"

He began to feel like running, like crying and running.

"Beans," the yellow-haired one said, "every day when you leave the house, she waits till you're out of sight. See? Then she runs out the back way. Know where she goes?"

Beans shook his head.

"She goes out into the woods. Sure as hell, she does. Ain't that right, fellas? Ain't it? Ain't Nana right out in Sackett's acre right now?"

"Damn right, sure she is, hell yes, Oh-boy."

"No," Beans said. "Wash."

"Wash my eye," yellow-hair said. "How you think she makes money so's you an' her can eat?"

They all laughed.

"Answer me, Beans," yellow-hair said.

"Wash," Beans said. "Wash clothes. Take wash, make money. Wash."

"No," yellow-hair said. "You're wrong, Beans. That's cover-up. That's for you to think. She's fooling you. You wouldn't want to think about your own sister out there in Sackett's, would you?"

"Ah, lay off the poor guy, Willy. What you bums going to do when the canning factory starts up? You won't be able to yell at Beans—what'll you do? You'll be working all day."

"Shut up," Willy said. "Beans,

your sister goes into the woods every day. She's layin' out there right this minute with one of the guys from Dexter."

"Nol" Beans said. A horrible feeling that he couldn't control overcame him completely and he swam through it wildly. He was sick, rotten sick, and he began to run. He ran at Willy and Willy laughed and gave him a shove and said, "Your sister's a whore, Beans!"

Beans tripped and fell by the steps.

"Let's see those eye-glasses, Beans."

They snatched his glasses off. They always did and the world went dizzy and blurred and he saw them moving in bright blurs. It was as if he were underwater, swimming in the river.

Somebody helped him up, dusted him off and he turned toward whoever it was, trying to tell him that Willy was wrong about Nana. Nana was at home, doing washing, as she did every day. The man kept brushing the dust off him, not speaking, and Beans kept on loudly telling him about Nana, and he looked at the mixed-up faces of the others, feeling proud, getting brushed off.

"Give him back his glasses."

"Oh, hell."

"His eyes ain't really so big."

Beans felt them put the glasses back on and everything cleared up fine.

"There," the one who'd been

brushing him off said. "You're clean, now, Beans."

"Yes," Beans said.

The hands that had brushed him shoved him reeling out into the road, and he sprawled heavily into the chilled September dust.

"Now you know what your sister is," Willy said.

They were laughing.

"You're a bunch of lousy crumbs," somebody said. "Doing a thing like that. He can't help himself, you know that. Why do you do it? Why? Tell me that?"

"What else is there to do?"

"We ain't hurting him none."

"Hey, Beans—let's hear it!"

He lumbered off down the road, but not because of what they'd done. When he'd fallen, his hands had still been on the knife, clutched tightly, and it had hurt. He wanted to get home and maybe Nana would kiss him. Happy feeling rushed through him.

Because that was a lie, about Nana. A lie! A lie!

He ran stumbling and fell and got up and ran stumbling.

"Hello, John," Nana said when he came into the kitchen. "You all right?"

He stared at her brightly, then began to weep. The tears rippled down his fat cheeks, rolling like wet diamonds from his big black eyes, flowing from the pink lids like water from a spring.

She was here. Nana. She wasn't in the woods.

"What's eating you now?"

"Nothing."

"Here," she said. She wiped his face with the hem of her skirt, then put her hands on his shoulders and looked at him. "You're putting on more weight," she said. "It's awful, John. You got to stop eating like you do. You're growing across, but you ain't growing up none."

He reached fumbling toward her with his left hand.

She took his hand and kissed it. The hot electricity jumped down through him like a bolt. She touched his face with her fingers and shook her head. "Poor old fool," she said. "Nobody gives a damn what happens to you, do they?"

He shook his head, smiling.

She leaned and kissed his forehead. He reeled slightly, clutching the knife, wanting to fling his arms around her and cry into her soapy smelling dress.

"Run along and do something, John," she said, sighing. "I got a hell of a pile of wash, believe me. But we'll have an extra dollar. Say! We'll have pie tonight!"

He nodded happily and kept searching for her hand. She kept moving her hand, playfully, out of the way of his. It was wonderful and so good, being with Nana, and he wished he could explain to her that he wouldn't have to kill her now.

He had planned on killing Nana like the bugs.

Now he wouldn't have to, because she was his, all his, and he grinned at her, feeling the cool knife. He could kill her with the knife, but she didn't go into Sackett's woods. If she did, then he would have to kill her like the bugs, because then he could save her for himself, like the bugs in the jar. Only he would keep her in bed. She wouldn't fit in the jar.

"All right, Nana," he said.

Because she was his.

"Yeah, honey," she said. "All right."

He stumbled to his room and lay on his bed and took out the knife, shielding it with his body. He stayed there on the bed, looking at the knife, folding and unfolding the blade, for some two hours.

"John?"

He looked at her in the doorway.

"John. Think hard, now. Did you take my yellow dress?"

"Dress?"

"Yes, I can't find it. I looked everywhere I can think of. Got to wash it out. Might's well do it with the rest of this junk. You seen it, John?"

He shook his head, watching her.

"Damn," she said. "Can't find it nowheres." She looked at him, then stepped over to the side of the bed. "Listen, John, honey—I know about that dress. And it's all right. You like to feel it on me, and it's your favorite, I know that. You didn't go an' sneak it off, just so's you could feel it in private, did you?"

"No."

"What you hiding there?"

"Nothing." He showed her his hand, the knife biting into his side where he lay on it.

"O. K., hon. You see that dress, you tell me, right?"

He reached clumsily for her hand. She touched his fingers and patted them lightly.

"Damn it," she said sadly. "Damn it all, anyways."

She went away and he fell asleep and when he stumbled into the kitchen later on, holding the knife in his pocket, she was gone. It was very still and awful and he could smell the soap and ironing and feel the swift rise of panic that sent him reeling and stumbling blindly out the door.

He hurried down the road, approached the store.

"Hey, Beans! Where you going?"

"Beans, come here. Come on the hell over here."

There was something different about them now. He always came by at this time, and usually they were sleepy or drunk by now, mid-afternoon. They had been drinking, he knew that, but there was something different.

"Nana?" he said.

"Yeah. You may well say that, brother," one of them said. "She ain't to home, is she?"

Beans shook his head.

"Too bad," one said.

"Too bad, hell," another said. "She's right nice. I just come back

from the woods, man. I can vouch for that."

He clutched the knife, watching them.

They were lying again. But where *was* Nana?

"Where's your sister, Beans?"

"Where?" he said. "Nana home."

They all shook their heads, very soberly this time, and frightened excitement began to stir Beans. He didn't know what to do because he knew Nana wasn't home. They "Ohhhed," and they, "Ahhhed."

"Won't work this time, Beans. We know, see?"

He looked around for Willy, the yellow-haired one. He wasn't with them.

"Why don't you lay off him?" somebody said.

"Ah, can it."

"Beans, we got something to tell you. Now, we want you should take it like the man you are. See?"

They laughed. Beans laughed. Then he quit laughing. What did they mean? What was it about Nana?

"He's some man, that's a fact."

"Old Beans."

"You eat lots of beans, Beans?"

"Hey, you're forgetting."

"Yeah. I got carried away. Beans —your sister's drunk as a lord. She says she don't never want to see you again, Beans. Never, never, never! She's got her a roll an' she's drunk as a pig."

They chuckled, waiting. He stood there and watched them, saying,

No, No, inside, way down in his belly, and feeling, No, No, too. It was all mixed up in his chest and he didn't know what to do.

"Mine," he said. "Nana. She's mine."

"Well, you go right ahead and think that, Beans. But I tell you, you're wrong. It ain't right, Beans. Because you're her brother, see? Well, she's got to have herself a man."

"Ten men," somebody said.

"She's drunk, Beans. We all been with her this afternoon an' we figured we should do you the favor of telling you. She's up there in the woods with two men from over to Dexter, right now, Beans. Earning some loot."

He looked at their faces. None of them were laughing. They were very calm and quiet and they shook their heads slowly.

"Naw," he said.

"Yes," one of them said. "Why, hell, Beans—she's only your sister. Man, you ought to catch yourself a different gal."

"Nana," he said.

"No, Beans. It's too late."

"Say, Beans," another said, stepping up to him. "Let's see those eyeglasses."

Beans tried to stop them, but they took his glasses away again and everything began to swim again, brightly, hazily.

"Beans," one said. "You know what your sister is, now. She don't like you around her, all the time

falling down, getting in her way."

Then the one who was speaking suddenly pointed and laughed and said, "Look at that, will you!" Then he whirled on Beans and said, "There, Beans! By God, that oughta tell you!"

Beans peered, following the pointed finger and heard them all talking and laughing and calling out and whistling. And he saw Nana coming down the dirt road. She had on the yellow dress that he liked so much and she reeled from one side to the other, drunk and stumbling. His yellow dress.

"Hey, Nana!" one of them called. "How about a little?"

She came on, reeling, swinging her hips and Beans watched her. Something frightening came up into his throat, choking him. He watched her stagger toward them in a yellow blur and he saw her flap her yellow skirt and wave at the men on the porch.

"Hey, Nana! Atta gal!"

He knew she was drunk. She could hardly stand up. He turned blindly, running at her in a crazy stumbling rush. They were right. They hadn't lied. They were his friends and Nana had been doing this all along—up in the woods, everywhere.

He ran and got out the knife and opened it.

"Nana!" he said.

Everybody was shouting. And Nana was trying to get away from him. She turned and ran and

tripped and fell on the ground.
"Nana," he said through tears.

They yelled and screamed at him, coming after him, their feet pounding, but they were too late. Much too late. He had the knife out, gleaming, and he leaped on her, thinking how he would keep her in bed beside him and he would wash the clothes now, but she would always be there. He would know she was there.

He cut her throat. One swipe of the knife, hard digging.

"Beans!" one of them shouted.

He felt the fist strike him and he gouged with the knife at Nana, but Nana was killed already. He knew that. The blood throbbed in scarlet gushes onto the yellow dress and the dirt of the road and he could see the red and the yellow.

One of them kept whispering, "What'll we do?" and he sounded like a crazy man. "What'll we do?"

Somebody said, "Turned out different than you thought, hey?"

"Shut up! *What'll we do?*"

Beans was holding Nana's hand, but it didn't feel like Nana's hand. This hand was hard and boned and her hand had been soft.

"He's killed Willy! We was only fooling with him, getting Willy to wear that yellow dress we stole. My God, he's slit Willy's throat. It's Willy's own knife, I tell you. He lost it down to the river yesterday forenoon. Willy's dead! You hear?"

"Home," Beans said, pulling at the yellow dress.

He heard the running feet and he heard the voice, too.

"John? What's going on here? John! What have these fools done to you. Oh, Lord!"

Nana was still bleeding and Beans didn't know what to do, because he had killed her. And Nana was talking to him.

He buried his face in the yellow dress, clutching the wet red cloth.

He felt an arm around him and saw the empty wash-basket that Nana used for delivering laundry.

Someone put his glasses on . . .



Courteous Crook

A stranger entered the home of Mrs. Elaine Zablocki, in Detroit, slugged her with a tire iron, gave her first aid and apologized for his violence. Then he demanded \$50. He fled when a visitor rang the front door bell.

Death Beat

*Drink themselves to death, okay.
But the Commissioner was awful
tired of these skid-row slob
being strangled every other night . . .*

BY DAVID C. COOKE



DAMN lousy shame," the man said. "Hell of a stinking thing. Guy's not safe on the street any more at night."

The cop looked at him, from his rundown shoes with their split seams to his unshaven face and bleary eyes. "On your way, vag," he growled, "before I run you in. This area's closed up, nobody supposed to be on the street."

The man laughed hoarsely. "The strangler, huh? You'll never catch him. He'll get another poor wino tonight."

"Not tonight he won't," the cop said. "We got the area blanketed. You slob want to drink yourself to death, that's okay. But the commissioner, he don't want you strangled."

The man laughed again. "Commissioner, shumissioner. A jerk. Must be, putting a monkey like you

on this beat. Death beat, that's what it is. Guy gets knocked off every other night. Been going on now two weeks."

"That's right," the cop said. "Two weeks. Tomorrow. But there won't be any more. He tries anything to-night, it's a bullet in the guts."

"Hal"

"The captain says shoot. Shoot to kill. Orders right from the top brass. He won't have a chance."

They walked along together, the cop swinging his nightstick, looking into dark doorways and alleys, looking up at dirty windows, keeping his eyes open, the man across the sidewalk from him, walking unsteadily, breathing heavily, too much booze running through his body and brain.

"You won't find him," the man said. "Too smart, that's what he is. Too smart for a bunch of dumb cops."

The cop stopped his measured walking, looked at the man. Soused to the gills, reeking of rotgut and sweat and filth. An ugly running sore in the midst of a healthy society. Better off dead. Hell, the strangler was doing the city a favor knocking off the scum and slime. But that's not what the commissioner said. These murders have to be stopped, he said, or some heads are going to go rolling. Good cops for lousy bums. Break one, let the other live. What kind of sense was that? The city had a clean-up drive on. Well, wasn't the strangler doing

his bit, wasn't he doing more than anybody else to clean up the city? And for what he was doing they had orders to shoot to kill.

Kill the strangler. Definite orders. But no laws to stop this wreck of what used to be a man from tailing along, insulting him. Rough him up and you get laced down, maybe a day or two off without pay. Justice.

The cop walked along the dark street, his footsteps slow and measured. He remembered, when he'd been a kid, how this was once a respectable part of the city. Not fancy, maybe, but peopled by fine, decent families like the Andersons, the Greens, the Whitsons. He used to live here himself, played in the streets. It was a nice place then, a place where it was fun to go out at night and run over to Schinholtze's candy store for some licorice or a water ice.

A fine and decent place. Then, so slowly you could hardly notice it, the cheap saloons came in, creeping up from the slums of Cherry Street where the rattaps were being torn down for a low-rent housing project. And with the saloons came the bums, following like a pack of mangy dogs after a bitch in heat. That was the death of the neighborhood. They killed the neighborhood as surely, if not as quickly, as the strangler was now killing her.

One by one the old families moved out, going uptown to escape what was happening. It didn't take

long before they were all gone. All except the Whitsons who had hung on to die on this strange street they had once loved, hoping in vain for another change, one for the better, that never came.

He stopped and tried the door to Poppa Steinman's clothing store. The sign said it was Steinman's, but Poppa had moved out years ago. Now, instead of hand-rolled linen handkerchiefs and pure silk ties, Poppa's old place sold second-hand suits for five dollars, thread-bare overcoats, battered hats. You could also get a bottle of green smoke for fifty cents under the counter, or a stick of marijuana or goof balls. The cop knew all about it, but he didn't care. Like the strangler, the owner of Poppa Steinman's old place was doing the city a favor by killing off the scum.

"You won't get him, stupid," the man said again. "Not you or the whole damn force. He's too smart."

The cop stopped again, his eyes cold and impersonal. He slapped the nightstick into his hand, wishing he could use it just once but knowing he couldn't.

"I told you to beat it, crud," he said, his voice now as hard as his eyes. "I'm not telling you again, slop-head. Tie a can to it, get the hell away from here."

The man made a ribald noise. "I'm sticking right with you, copper. Where you go, I go. The strangler's smart, and so'm I. He won't touch me with a cop by my side."

"Okay," the cop growled, more to himself than the vag, "tonight tag along and be damned."

They walked on down the street, the black, lonely street where the cop had once played stickball and marbles, where he'd splashed around in his bathing trunks in the summer when the firemen turned on the hydrant to cool the steaming asphalt, where he'd slid gleefully on the ice and snow in the winter.

All dead dreams that could never come back. Memories of fun and laughter and clean living and clean friends like Bill Anderson, Bob Whitson, Ike Green and plenty of others too. And now, blotting out all those wonderful times, burying them under a layer of fetid dung, the filth and stagnation.

But thank God it was nearly over. Just tonight, then a night off, then another beat. A beat in a different part of the city, a clean part of the city, where he would see clean people and clean living and have clean thoughts. He turned into an alley to check the back door to a shop, and the man shuffled along behind him. Suddenly he stopped, his senses alert. There was someone else in the alley. It was too dark to see, but he had heard something, a sharp indrawn breath or the scraping of a shoe.

One hand drew the gun from its holster. He flicked the switch of his flashlight with the other, his finger tense on the trigger.

The pale beam pinpointed a derelict on the ground, his tongue blue and swollen between white lips. Dead.

And standing above the body, Bob Whitson.

Bob said, "He was going to be the last one." The cop had never before heard such resignation in any man's voice.

"Kill the bastard," the bum demanded. "Kill him, damn you. He's the strangler!"

"Why'd you do it, Bob? Why in hell'd you do it?"

"You ask a question like that? You—saw with your own eyes what scum like this did to our street?"

"Shoot him. Goddamn you, shoot!"

"I hate them for it, every bastard one of them," Whitson said. I'm moving out tomorrow, but I wanted to get one more. Just one more, and then the end."

"Damn you to hell, *shoot!*"

The cop turned it over in his

mind. The killings had to stop; that's what the commissioner said. And when he gave an order he meant it. If they didn't stop, the heads of a lot of good cops would go rolling.

But they were over. He had Bob Whitson's word, and that was good enough for him. They had known each other long enough, had laughed together enough times, had played in the streets together enough years.

Still, he had his duty to perform. He was a good cop, had sworn to uphold the law. He couldn't jeopardize his name or record.

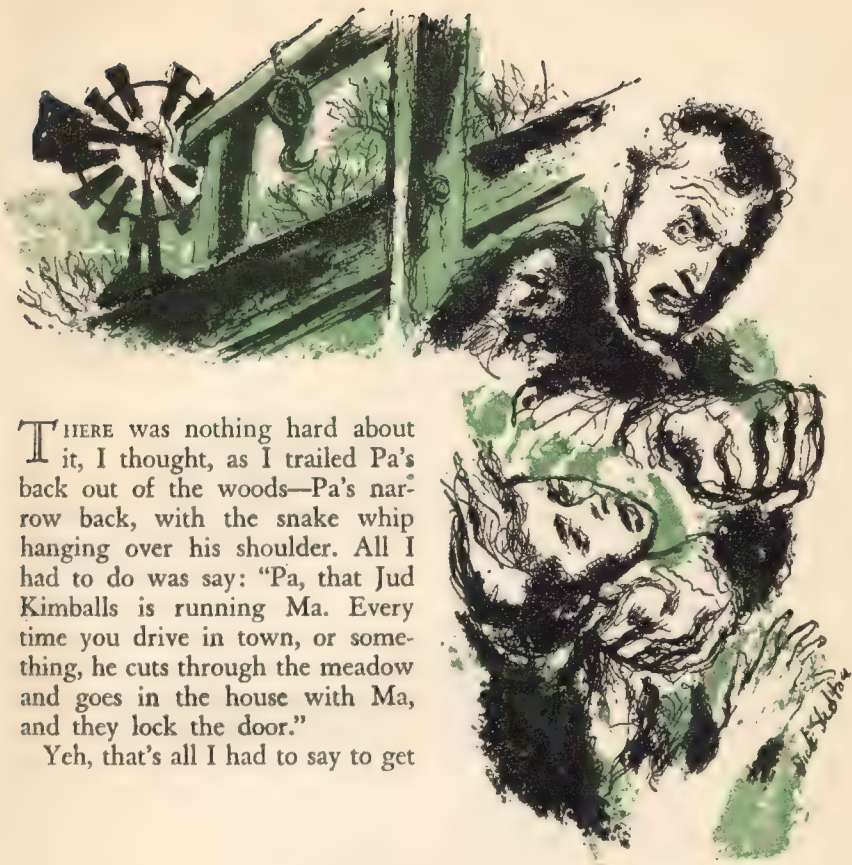
He turned and squeezed the trigger, then again, smashing the bum back against the brick wall, spilling him face-down next to a garbage can.

Slowly he holstered his gun. "Had to do it," he said quietly. "Caught him killing another one, and he tried to run. You saw it."

"Sure," Whitson said. "Sure, I saw it. You'll get a medal, Al."



A young San Angelo father was charged with theft recently in Brownwood, Tex. Police said they found \$70 taken from a service station that was hidden in a diaper worn by a three month old baby who was being carried by the thief's wife.



THERE was nothing hard about it, I thought, as I trailed Pa's back out of the woods—Pa's narrow back, with the snake whip hanging over his shoulder. All I had to do was say: "Pa, that Jud Kimballs is running Ma. Every time you drive in town, or something, he cuts through the meadow and goes in the house with Ma, and they lock the door."

Yeh, that's all I had to say to get

Cowpatch Vengeance

I screamed. The thing the bull was tossing around was the bloody, mangled body of Pa.

BY CHARLES W. MOORE

this awful load off my chest. But I didn't. I just let it go on building up in there and eating at me. I couldn't bring myself to hurt Pa. I guess Ma and Jud figured that.

It was a cool October afternoon, back in the old days. The ground was damp and mucky from heavy rains. You could smell the stench of the black mud down in the thick scrub bushes and feel the bite of the fall wind in your face.

Pa and I had driven the cows out of the big woods and were herding them through the long, bush-covered meadow towards the big pound, where we'd grain and hay them and bed them down, like we did this time every afternoon.

As usual, old Blackie, the bull, was showing off—snorting and belching and taking his time as he trailed behind the herd, weaving around the cowpath. Blackie was the meanest old devil you ever saw, but Pa could cool him down with that snake whip of his. Pa might be little, but he could cool most anything down with that snake whip. Anything, that was, except Ma.

I watched his calloused finger start moving to and fro as he counted the herd ahead of us. Three times he counted them. Then he turned to me.

"Son," he said in that soft voice of his. "Old Brindle's missin'. Guess she took a notion to stay in the woods all night again." Pa

looked fondly on my lean, twelve-year-old frame, clad in the tight, black, homemade overalls and jacket. His narrow face was its usual picture of kindness—wrinkled early from sun and hard work, but kind, just the same. "How' about you goin' back there and findin' her for Pa?"

"Sure," I said. "Sure, Pa."

When I turned and headed back into the woods, I noticed how pretty it was, with the red and the brown and the gold leaves all mixed together and tumbling towards the ground as the fall chill clipped them from the branches. Funny how different things looked when I felt I was important to Pa. But, deep inside, I still had that rotten feeling for keeping such an awful thing as I knew about Jud Kimballs and Ma away from him. And I wasn't going to keep it any longer. As soon as I found old Brindle and joined Pa again, I was going to tell him. Come hell or high water, I was going to tell him.

I got so tense at the thought, I could almost feel the freckles across my face pricking me.

Old Brindle was back in the clean-smelling pine grove. When she spied me, her tail flew up and she took out on the trail of the others. I could run like lightning them days, I guess that's why they called me Rabbit, and Brindle didn't get far ahead of me.

Before long, we were out in the long meadow again, tearing it

down the crooked cow path. Then, all at once, the old cow gave a funny snort, veered from the path and bellowed down deep in her neck.

I was almost on top of the awful sight, before I knew what was happening. There was old Blackie, bellowing and snorting and tossing something about with his sharp, stubby horns. I stopped and screamed. The thing the bull was tossing about was the bloody, mangled body of Pa.

I rushed to where the snake whip had been tossed in the bushes, grabbed it up and lashed it into the snorting nose with all I had. Finally, Blackie gave up, turned with a wild bellow and made after the rest of the herd.

Falling on Pa's busted, bloody body, I cried and pleaded with him to talk to me. But I knew it was no use. Pa would never talk to anybody again.

Through his tattered shirt, I saw the awful marks the bull had made on him. But there was one mark I saw there I knew wasn't made by the horns. It was a deep gash between his shoulder-blades that had been made by something like a long knife.

I got slowly to my feet and wiped my eyes on the sleeve of my jacket. I knew it would do me no good to try to prove that the bull had not killed Pa, for in those days, and in cowpatch country, they'd just laugh at a snot-nose kid like me,

after seeing all the other ugly marks the horn had left.

This was cowpatch country, and things here were done cowpatch style. When a man died or got killed, they nailed a box together, put him inside and planted him in his own graveyard.

But I'd always know Blackie couldn't have gotten to Pa like that with this snake whip in his hand—if something hadn't happened.

I scrambled through the bushes and searched the soft mud, deeper in the meadow, for tracks. I thought I saw some big ones, leading in the direction of the high woods that ran behind Jud Kimballs' place, but I couldn't be quite sure. The black mud closed in over tracks awful fast in there, and you couldn't track anything in the woods, with all the leaves underfoot.

So I turned back, feeling a bitter storm of helplessness rise up inside me.

I herded the cows up into the pound and locked the heavy gate on them. I hung the snake whip over a nail in the carriage house, walked up to the old two-story clapboard house, with the mossy roof and the big elm trees hovering over it, and went in to Ma.

Ma was a tall, slender woman who wore gay colored long skirts and silky, white blouses. She had hair as red as the sunset and eyes the color of ripe tobacco. Her skin

was smooth and clear, and I couldn't help but think what a shame it was that she was man-crazy.

She was feeding wood into the big, black cookstove when I walked in. Smoke bounced off the white-washed walls.

"Pa's been killed—down there in the meadow," I said real soft-like, not caring for her to see the bitterness that was leaking out of me.

She let the lid she was holding on the lifter fall on the stove, turned to me and a slim white hand went to her full mouth. I watched them brown eyes of hers go wide and heard a little moan break under her breath.

After awhile, she moved up close to me and put her soft hands on my shoulders. Her face was as white as a wild lily, like all the blood had drained out, and her lips were turning blue.

"How'd it happen, Rabbit?" Ma had a heavy voice, and it was real hoarse now.

"I guess old Blackie got to him." I didn't look in her eyes. "Least, that's what I found when I got there."

"You sure he's dead, Rabbit?"

I shrugged her hands off my narrow shoulders and walked over to the west window to look down across the scrub bushes that covered the meadow. In my mind, I could see Pa's body, twisted over the cowpatch, just as plain as if I was standing over him.

"He's dead all right," I said, whirling quickly on Ma, standing there in the middle of the clean-scrubbed board floor. "And I'll bet you're glad he's dead, Ma!" I screamed. "Glad he's dead, so maybe you can marry Jud Kimballs!"

"Shut your mouth! Shut your mouth right now!" Ma said harshly, taking three quick steps towards me. I guess the look that must have been in my eyes must have changed her mind about coming any closer.

"Why ain't you crying, Ma? Pa, your husband, is dead, laying down there in the meadow with blood streaming all over him!" I could feel my thin lips curl back like a dog's that has taken all he can and decided to make a stand. "Why ain't you crying, Ma?"

Ma's body sagged. She turned her eyes away from mine.

"Tears just won't seem to come, Rabbit," she said. "There's times like that."

"I bet you don't know what's in my mind, Ma?"

"Maybe I do." She walked limply over to the tall cupboard that sat near the cookstove, took a dishcloth down from a nail on the side of it and started twisting and wringing it in her hands.

"What's in my mind, Ma?"

"Suppose you tell me."

"I think Jud Kimballs jumped out of the bushes on Pa, when I went back in the woods after old Brindle. I think he stuck a knife

in Pa's back and left him there for old Blackie to finish off. That's what I think, Ma! And I wouldn't be surprised if you and him thought the whole thing up together!"

She didn't look at me yet. She just stood there and kept twisting the dishcloth into a tight knot.

"That's what I thought maybe you thought, Rabbit."

"But it don't make no difference what I think, does it? It's that way, ain't it, Ma?"

"I didn't say it don't make no difference, Rabbit." Her voice was grinding like a grist mill now.

"All right, Ma. All right." Like I thought back in the meadow, it wasn't no use to carry on or try to win a point with cowpatch grownups. You were a snot-nose kid, you were a snot-nose kid. That was it. You won nothing but misery trying to do different. "What you want me to do, Ma? You want me to gear old Russell up to the sled and go down there and bring him on up?"

Her eyes came slowly around on mine.

"I want you to go over and get Jud Kimballs, Rabbit. Tell him what's happened. Tell him—we need his help."

It wasn't that I figured I needed Jud Kimballs' help that made me obey Ma. It was something deeper than that. Maybe I wanted to get close to Jud, so that I'd have more

of a chance to get even. Maybe I wanted to get near him so that I could prove something to myself that I wasn't quite sure of yet. I couldn't explain the reason to myself right then, except that I just wanted to get close to this man who I hated more'n any living creature on earth.

Jud's place was to the northeast of ours. Across a high, thirty-acre field, a neat-trimmed thornhedge divided our farm from his. You could see his big white house and clustering of white buildings from our place; they were sitting down close to the big woods. Blue smoke piled out of his chimneys and whipped about in the wind.

As I walked across the field, I could feel the crunch of dying grass under my feet. The smell of the ripe shocks, from the cornfields about me, caught in my nostrils, reminding me that me and Pa had been out in our cornfield a few hours ago, shucking corn together and tying the fodder in neat bundles for the cows during the winter just ahead.

Nobody could know how I felt inside, with Pa out of my life. I was just like a locust shell, empty and brittle.

When I got to Jud Kimballs', I found him down in his pound, bending over the horse trough. His brown leather boots, I noticed, were wet—like maybe black meadow mud had just been washed off them. He was washing some-

thing off in the horse trough, and when I looked closer through the board fence, I saw it was a long knife. The water in the trough had turned a little red where he was washing, like blood had been spilled in it.

"Been killing pigs, Jud?" I said.

He looked up with a start, for he didn't know anybody was near. His big, square face fixed on me, with his wide mouth a little open and his thin nostrils flaring. His head was bare, as it most always was, and long, brown, curly hair hung all over it. I knew he didn't like me calling him Jud. He seemed to figure I ought to call him mister, but I could never bring myself to do that, and Pa had never made me.

"Naw, not pigs," he answered me at last, in that booming voice of his. "I just stuck myself a big old rabbit."

I felt my insides twist into knots. I watched him dry the long blade off on a big blue handkerchief and thought how nice it would be to bury that knife deep between his thick, powerful shoulders.

"Whatta ya mean, Rabbit, by sneakin' up on a feller like this?" he growled at me.

"I didn't mean to sneak up on you, Jud," I told him through the boards. "Ma sent me—with news."

"Well," said Jud, a wry smile breaking across his broad face, "if Ma sent ya, that's different." He jabbed the long knife in the gate

post, the other side of the trough. "What's the news, Rabbit?"

"Ma sent me to tell you that Pa's dead—down in the meadow—and that we need your help."

His eyes fell away from mine. He stood there for a long while, pulling the knife out of the post and sticking it back again, pulling it out and sticking it back again.

Jud Kimballs was a fancy dresser. You never saw a spot of dirt on his brown clothes. The fact was, he never worked. Just then, I saw a bunch of men coming out of his big corn field. They did the work for him like the two cooks he had up there in the big kitchen.

"What killed him, Rabbit?" Jud asked, as his big head looked up again.

"Old Blackie," I muttered. "Old Blackie got him with his horns—I guess."

"I told him that bull was gonna get him one day," said Jud, coming through the pound gate. "Hard headed old devil. Serves him almost right."

I felt a bitter lump rise up in my throat, such as I'd never felt before. I felt like I was going to strangle on it, but I somehow managed to choke it back.

"I'll tell the men where I'm goin'," said Jud, "then I'll be right with ya."

We didn't go to my house when we left Jud's place, but headed straight through the woods, towards the meadow. I had to trot

all the way to keep up with Jud's long strides, crunching through the leaves.

The funny thing about it was that I didn't have to lead him to where Pa's body was. Jud Kimballs knew right where to go. That's when I was sure he'd killed Pa.

Jud threw Pa's bloody body over his broad shoulder and carried it to the house like it was a sack of pig feed. I was glad I was behind him, for I wouldn't want him to see the bitter tears streaming down my face.

He hadn't said a word to me since we'd left his place. I guess he was thinking what a dumb kid I was.

Up to the house, he threw the body on the back porch. Then Ma came out, and I noticed she had changed her clothes and had brushed her hair until it was shining like red silk. But at the sight of Pa, her hand flew to her mouth just the way it did when I first told her about Pa.

"Jud, you oughtn't to..." Her voice trailed off through her fingers.

"Oughtn't to what, Kitty?" His broad face turned on her and I caught him give her a big, slow wink. "Oughtn't to brought him up over my shoulder like that. Shucks, he wasn't heavy, Kitty. No heavier'n a rabbit."

Something caught in Ma's

throat. She turned and ran into the house.

Jud looked at me and laughed. "Women!" he chuckled. "No guts. Good only for lovin'. Let's go find some boards, boy. We gotta coffin to nail together."

"I'll go on feed the cows before it gets dark, Jud." I wanted to get off by myself. "You'll find saw, hammer, nails and boards over there in the shed."

Jud looked down on me real hard then, and his square face got like an anvil. "When I say go feed the cows, you'll go feed the cows. Right now, I say we gotta coffin to nail together. Right, boy?"

I nodded. And I followed his wide back to the rickety shed.

"Ya know," he said as he marked the boards off for me to saw, "I gotta feelin' you and me's gonna hit it off right good."

"Funny, Jud," I told him as I sawed the rough boards, "but I got the same feeling."

My arm started aching, but I'd never let Jud Kimballs know. My heart was aching, too, at the thought of Pa up there on the back porch, like a piece of game a hunter had brought up and thrown down; but Jud would never know. My mind was all torn up at the thought of Ma up there, loving a man like this, when Pa had always been so good and kind and thoughtful towards her; but Jud would never know that, either. Things were just going to work

their way out cowpatch style, I figured, with Jud knowing nothing of my mind until the right time came.

When we got the heavy box nailed together, it was sundown. The pigeons were flapping to their roosts under the eaves of the rickety buildings, and some neighbors' voices reached me on the fall wind.

Jud got to one end of the box, and I got to the other. We carried it into the parlor, as Ma held the doors open for us, sat it in there on the bare floor and took the lid off.

"You're stronger than you look, boy," said Jud, his big hands on his hips. "You didn't have to set it down once."

"I can do lots people think I can't," I said, standing straight in front of him.

Jud laughed, from deep inside somewhere.

I watched Ma as she put some pillows and clean sheets in the long box, and wondered what was in her mind. But it wouldn't be good to know what was in others minds, I thought. That way, others would know what was in yours.

Jud went out on the porch and got Pa, and Ma went after some water and clean clothes.

When Jud came back in, he looked at me over Pa's body. "Ya go feed the cows now," he ordered roughly.

I went to the carriage house, in

the thickening dusk, got the snake whip and went down to the barn. I got two bags of chopped corn out and poured it in the troughs Pa and I had built around the inside of the pound fence. The cows and their calves scrambled over and started crunching the grain. Then I went up in the loft over the cowshed and forked hay down through the holes in the floor.

In these days, we didn't raise cattle for milk—just for veal and beef—so there was no milking to do.

When I came down out of the loft, I could hear the low rumble of Blackie's mean bellow coming across to me. I walked through the pound, just to show him I wasn't afraid. I cracked the whip in the direction of his snorting nose and watched him cower back towards the loading chute.

A lot of things had might as well get it into their heads that I wasn't afraid of them anymore, I told myself as I climbed over the fence and headed towards the house, where the yellow glow of lamps flickered through the windows.

I hung the snake whip back up in the carriage house as I went by, and walked softly up on the back porch. Through the kitchen window, I could see Jud Kimballs with Ma in his arms. He was trying to kiss her, but Ma had her head turned to one side like she

didn't want to be kissed. Maybe it was because she was afraid I might walk in on them, I thought.

I pushed the door open and watched them step apart. The yellow flame of the lamp on the table flickered as the breeze from the doorway whipped down its chimney. That caused shadows to dance all over the whitewashed walls.

"Needn't stop because I'm in," I told them, closing the door. "I'll have to get used to it, anyhow."

"That boy's pretty flippy, ain't he?" sneered Jud from his stance there in the middle of the floor.

Ma's face flushed; her neck had turned all red too.

I walked in to where Pa was, all clean and peaceful looking down in the homemade box, with the yellow lamplight playing on his hollow face. And, all at once, I began thinking of how quiet it must have been before anything was put on the earth, and how quiet it must be after you left it. I got on my knees beside Pa and started praying, as best I knew how.

After awhile, Jud Kimballs left and Ma came in.

Ma sat in a big, hard rocker and started rocking, rocking like her nerves were ready to snap. I knew she was crying, without looking, for I could hear it deep in her throat.

I got up off my knees, went to the window—wind was coming in

from the cracks around it—and looked up through the howling elm branches to the sharp, glittering stars.

"You loved him a lot, didn't you, son?" came Ma's unsteady voice.

It was the first time for so long that Ma hadn't called me Rabbit.

"I loved him a whole lot, Ma. I loved you, too—'till you got mixed up with that Jud Kimballs."

The rocker stopped. The wind even seemed to quit blowing. Silence just wrapped around everything, holding it still. Then I felt Ma's hand on my shoulders, felt her soft cheek against mine.

"If I gave up Jud, would you love me again, son?"

I kept looking at the stars.

"Jud Kimballs wouldn't let you give him up," I whispered. "Jud Kimballs wouldn't let anything that he wanted give him up."

"Why, son?" Ma's finger were biting into my shoulders. "Why wouldn't he?"

I kept on looking at the stars.

"'cause Jud Kimballs knows you knew he was going to kill Pa. That's why!"

"I didn't know no such thing!" She spun me around to face her. "I didn't know, son! You hear me? I didn't..."

I shrugged her hands off my shoulders and walked over to look down on Pa again.

"You know more than you're lettin' on, Ma. A whole lot more."

Ma folded her long arms on the

window casing, let her head fall on them and sobs shook her body such as I'd never heard before. Let her pay, I thought. Let her pay good. And as soon as I got my chance, Jud Kimballs was going to pay, too.

When she cried herself dry, she turned on me again. "You got no proof Jud killed Pa. No proof at all. It's just something you got up in that thick head of yours. That's all."

"I didn't say I had proof, Ma. Proof wouldn't do me no good, nohow. Jud Kimballs is the richest man around here. Nobody'd dare turn against him. Besides, this is cowpatch country, where things work themselves out most of the time—one way or the other."

She took a couple steps closer to me.

"Whata you mean by 'cowpatch country', Rabbit?"

"Just a name I thought up myself," I said.

"Oh!" said Ma, and she went over and sat in the rocker again.

There was another long silence, then Ma broke it.

"Jud's coming over in the morning. He's bringing over one of his men to help bury Pa. When that's done, he's going to load old Blackie and take him off to market. He says Blackie ain't no fit bull to be around a kid." She waited for awhile to let her words sink in on me. "Jud won't be bad to you, Rabbit, if you'll only meet him

halfway. He says he's gonna pay the thousand dollar mortgage off for us, too."

As I kept looking down on Pa, I thought of Jud Kimballs hauling Blackie off to market to help pay the mortgage off, just like everything else he'd take off Pa's farm. If he had any thought of selling something out of fear it would hurt me, it would be because he'd want to save me to be one of his work hands. And as far as meeting Jud halfway, I'd meet him halfway one of these days all right. All I wanted was one chance.

I turned from Pa.

"Jud and me'll get along fine, Ma," I said. "Don't you worry."

I headed for the kitchen and climbed up the ladder that led to the dark room above, where my straw bed was.

When Jud came the next morning, he was in his big black carriage. A high-stepping roan horse was prancing in front of it, and sitting beside Jud was one of his husky hired men.

The sun was just rising, a big red ball over the eastern rim of the frost sparkling fields. You could hear cocks crowing and crows screaming from all over the countryside. I was leaning against one of the big elm trees, raking some dirt around the roots with the toe of my shoe. I hadn't slept during the night, but I wasn't tired. Ma

had fixed me a good breakfast of eggs and bacon and hot shortbread, but I wasn't hungry enough to eat. I had walked out and fed the cows and turned them down in the meadow. All except Blackie.

So much hate had piled up in me during the night, that I didn't even trust myself to look up at Jud Kimballs when he drew his horse under the tree beside me, got down from the carriage and hitched him.

"Mornin', Rabbit," he boomed. "Hook a hoss to the sled and bring it up here. Me and Jess'll get the old man loaded and get the job done." He looked down towards the pound where Blackie was pawing and bellowing like crazy, sending chunks of dirt as high as the buildings with his sharp hoofs. "See ya kept old Blackie in, so we can get him loaded later on. That's good thinkin', Rabbit. Thinkin' like that's gonna save you a lotta trouble, boy."

I went down to the stable, threw the harness on old Russell and hooked him to the sled. I loaded shovels, picks, axes and bramble-scythe, so Jud wouldn't get the pleasure of telling me to do it, and led Russell to the house.

They had the box, with Pa's body in it, out on the porch when I got there, and Ma and Jud and the big hired man, Jess, were standing around it.

"Hurry up, Rabbit!" hollered

Jud, holding a Bible in his thick hands. "We ain't got all day."

As I got to them, I noticed Ma's face was drawn more than I'd ever seen it. She looked like she was about to fall.

Jud read something from the Bible that I felt sure never got any nearer heaven than his sneering lips. After that, he handed the Bible to Ma. Then we loaded Pa on the sled and went back to the graveyard, leaving Ma behind.

For a minute, I thought what a shame it was to have no more relatives to cry over you than Pa had. But then I guessed he didn't know anything about that, being dead.

I stopped old Russell at the edge of the bush and honeysuckle-covered circle of high ground where Pa's ancestors were buried, and Jud looked on the site and spit.

"It's a damned sure thing yer old man didn't figure on gettin' planted here anytime soon, the way he let it grow up." He waved a big hand in my face. "Get the scythe and clean off a spot, boy. What the hell ya standin' around for?"

I didn't talk back. I didn't want to give him an excuse to knock my teeth down my throat. That's what he wanted to do, I knew, now that I was away from Ma. So I set to work with the bramble-scythe and cleaned off a spot. Then Jess marked off a place big enough for the coffin to fit in and me and

him started digging, not doing any talking, just digging.

When we'd finished, Jud called Jess and each of them took an end of the coffin and dropped it in the hole like a pig was in it. I felt my heart drop with it, and turned my head to keep them from seeing the pain on my face.

Jud took a plug of tobacco from his pocket, bit off a big chew and ground it around with his teeth.

"Somethin' about the dead that always did hit me in the pit of the stomach," he growled. "Maybe this tobacco'll settle it."

I watched him spit a long string of juice on Pa's coffin, felt his hard, green eyes turn on me.

"Whata ya waitin' for, boy? Start shovelin'. I don't know about you, but I'm anxious to get that smell covered up down there." He turned to Jess. "Ya'd might as well go home and get to shuckin' corn. The youngun can cover his old man up all right."

Jess seemed mighty glad to get away, and I started shoveling the loose dirt over Pa.

Jud sat down opposite me on a clump of dry grass that wouldn't mess his pants up and kept eyeing me and spitting tobacco juice in on Pa's grave. I thought of taking the shovel and bashing his head in as he sat there, but I knew it was a crazy thought. With him sitting right there watching every move I made, what chance would I have against the power in that man.

I thought of just throwing the shovel down and running away. But Pa had always told me: "You don't gain nothin' by runnin' away, son. It's better for the mind, to stay and take a beatin' than to run away and wonder for the rest of your life what woulda happened if you had a stayed. So thinking that way, I stayed."

I felt the blisters start puffing up in the palms of my hands from the shovel handle, but I didn't say anything. I was one person that Jud would never hear complain. He'd never have that satisfaction. I knew he hated everything about me, just like he'd hated Pa for being married to Ma. I knew he couldn't stand the thought of me being a part of Ma. He was that kind of man.

After a while, I started rounding off the grave, and that's when Jud rose to his feet, brushed the seat of his pants and broke the silence.

"To hell with the fancy stuff," he boomed. "Ya wanna round it off, come back here some Sunday and do it. I wanna get that bull loaded, so ya can drive him in to market." He went over and sat on the sled. "Come on. Get the tools on and let's get goin'."

When we got back to the barnyard, I unhitched old Russell from the sled and hitched him, with a bay mare we had, to the cattle wagon. Jud went over to inspect the loading chute.

"Damn it to hell," he roared, snorting past me as he headed for the house, "that bull'd kill a man tryin' to load him from that chute! Get the hammer, nails and ax over there. I'll be right back."

When he went in the house, I heard Ma scream: "Keep your hands off me, Jud Kimballs!"

I started to go up there, but changed my mind when Jud came quickly out of the house and headed for where I stood by the loading chute. I had the hammer and nails and ax, like he'd told me.

Old Blackie had come over now and stood bellowing and snorting and pawing down there in the pound, as close to me as the gate across the bottom of the chute would let him get.

Jud was mad when he came up to me. His thick neck was red as fire. I don't know what had gone on between him and Ma up there, but I don't think I've ever seen a man mad as he was.

He grabbed the bucket of nails and hammer out of my hands and, the way he looked down on me, I thought for a minute he was going to pick me up and throw me over there to the bull. But he climbed up in the chute.

"Hold that ax opposite where I nail, boy, so's to stay me," he blasted, glaring down at me.

"I know how," I said. "Pa showed me."

Jud started hammering the loose boards together real hard. I held

the butt of the ax against the powerful force of his blows with all my might.

"There's just one thing the old man didn't show ya." Jud stopped hammering all at once and glared down on me again. "And that's how to keep your damned mouth shut. I guess I'll have to teach ya that."

The only sounds for a minute were the low rumbling sounds the bull was making, right down below Jud.

"Don't ever lay a hand on me, Jud Kimballs!" I was surprised how steady my voice was.

A nasty snarl curled Jud's lips as he sat the bucket of nails and hammer down and leaped off the end of the chute in front of me.

The next thing I knew, he'd wrung the ax from my hands. His left hand had the collar of my coat, and his right one was smacking my face into a pulp.

I guess he thought I'd cry after awhile, but I didn't. I fought the tears back. And, at last, he stopped smacking me.

"You little bastard," he rumbled deep down in his thick throat. "I'll get to ya better, one of these days."

I tasted the blood from my swollen lips and felt it start creeping down from out of my nose. The big, black bull was going crazy down there at the foot of the chute now.

"Now pick up that ax and help me get this job finished," ordered

Jud, turning and stepping a foot up on the loading end of the chute. "And keep that damned mouth of yours shut."

I picked the ax up, all right. But I did it a little faster than Jud expected. He was just at a balance on the chute where a quick tap behind the ear from the butt of the ax caused him to sprawl, all crazy-like, and tumble down to the gate at the bottom. I didn't hit him hard enough to kill him, just to daze him. I didn't want murder on my hands.

Then I jumped quickly to where the gate release was, sprung it and watched old Blackie go to work on the man I hated. Jud came to just long enough to let out one big, horrified yell. That was all.

I felt something soft on my

trembling shoulder, and when I turned, there was Ma. She had a queer sort of satisfied look about her that I hadn't seen for a long time.

"I told him a thousand times not to kill Pa, son," came Ma's deep voice. "A thousand times I told him. But it didn't do no good, son. No good at all."

My eyes went back to old Blackie and the helpless bulk down on the ground.

"Sometimes nothing does no good around here, Ma," I told her. "Nothing except to just let things work out cowpatch style."

I took a hold of Ma's hands and kissed them. Then I went to unhitch the horses from the cattle wagon. I had to go over and tell Jess what had happened to his boss.



Stolen Parts Dept.

In Newport Beach, Calif., Mrs. Howard Lawrence couldn't get her car started and called a mechanic. The mechanic found that a thief had stolen the vehicle's drive shaft.

Sabotage

And in Passaic County, N. J., Sheriff Norman Tetttersall called a mechanic after the station wagon used to transport prisoners from the jail to the courthouse began stalling frequently. The mechanic found a collection of stones, marbles, thumb tacks, pieces of metal and steel wool, sugar and candy in the gas tank.

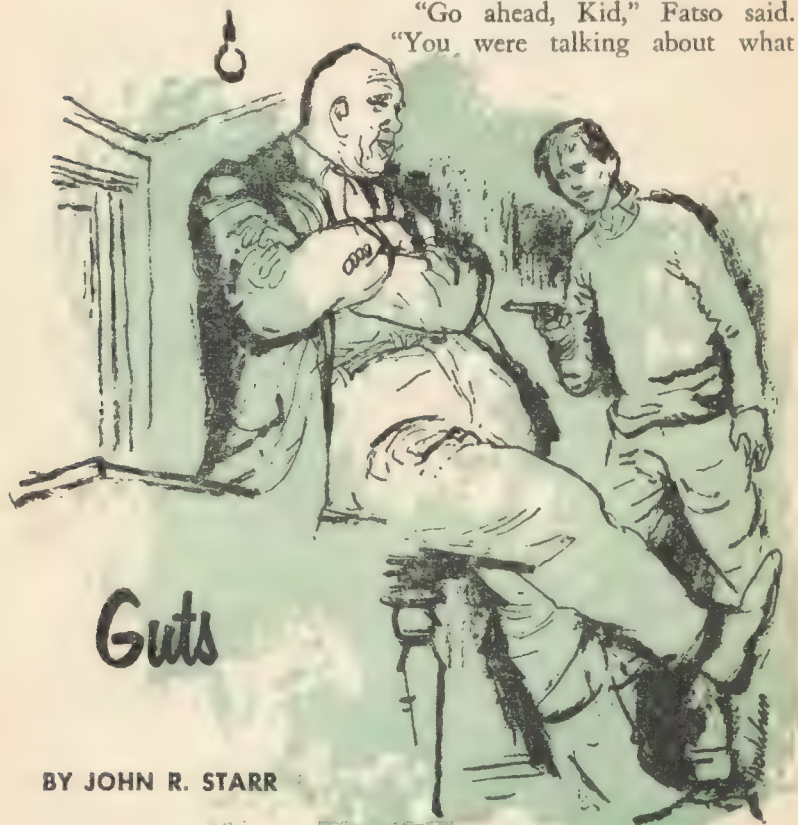
"From now on," the sheriff announced, "prisoners will be watched and the gas tank will be locked when the car is washed."

OSTRICH KELLY swallowed his Adam's apple, One Horse O'Keefe whinnied in alarm and Bug Eyes Jackson's eyes bulged. The Kid was sweating as he stood in the middle of the room with the pistol pointed at Fatso Donelly's

belly. The only calm guys in the room were Fatso and Hero Lafferty, who had handed the gun to the Kid in the first place.

The Kid looked down at the gun a couple of times like he couldn't believe he had it and tried to imitate Hero's nonchalant smirk, but he just managed to look sick.

"Go ahead, Kid," Fatso said. "You were talking about what



BY JOHN R. STARR

He wasn't afraid to draw with the kid. But why take chances?

you'd do if you had a gun on me. You've got a gun on me now. Or hadn't you noticed?"

The Kid ran his tongue around hot, dry lips, trying to suck up the right words to get him out of that jam. He couldn't understand why Hero, who had sponsored him into the gang, had put him on such a spot. He appealed to Hero with wide, hollow eyes.

"Kid," said Hero in a brotherly tone, "you got a real big mouth. You were in enough trouble when you drove off and left two guys stranded on that job. In some gangs, you'd have got killed for that, even if the guys did get away. All Fatso did was dress you down, but you had to show him how brave you are with your big mouth. Well, you've got a chance to prove how brave you are right now. All you have to do is pull that trigger."

"Christ," whined the Kid, "I didn't ask for this. I asked him to draw with me, yeah, but it don't take guts to gun a guy who's just sitting there, smiling at you."

"It takes more guts than you got," Hero said softly. "It takes more guts than it would if he was drawing on you, because then you'd be so scared for your own hide you wouldn't have time to think. When you stop to think about killing, it works on you. Especially the first time, Kid."

The Kid didn't like Hero reminding him that he was the only guy in the room without a killing

to his credit, but he wasn't thinking of protesting. He was desperately stirring his mind for a way out and he couldn't see one. If he gunned Fatso, he'd get one bullet, maybe more, from each of the guys in the room. If he chickened out, he'd stamped himself a coward and there was no room for cowards in Fatso Donnelly's gang.

"Shoot me, Kid," said Fatso.

The Kid aimed the gun, took a deep breath and tightened his finger on the trigger.

Fatso started laughing, deep in his belly.

"Go ahead," he said. "Go ahead."

The Kid dropped the gun, bit his tongue to keep from screaming and ran out of there.

Fatso heaved himself up out of the chair. Kelly puked up his Adam's apple. One Horse quit whinnying. Bug Eyes' eyeballs returned to their sockets. The few drops of perspiration that had popped out on Hero Lafferty's forehead were the only remaining sign of the tension which had gripped the room.

Fatso leaned over ponderously and picked up the gun. He tossed it into the air and caught it deftly.

"Boys," he said, "there's five hundred bucks for the man who gets the Kid."

Usually such an offer would have set them off running, but they were still too amazed by the demonstration they had just witnessed.

"Christ, Boss," whinnied One

Horse, "I ain't never seen a guy show guts like you did. The way you kept laughing at him!"

Fatso's lips cracked wide to show uneven, yellow-teeth. He tapped his round, bald head with the barrel of the pistol.

"No guts, boys! Let this be a little lesson to you. Guts is a poor substitute for brains and I've got brains. Mind you, I'm not afraid to draw with the Kid, but why take chances? So I got together with Hero before you guys got here. The gun Hero gave him wasn't loaded. Ain't that a riot?"

And, laughing, he put the pistol

to his temple and pulled the trigger.

Close as they were standing, none of them could avoid being splattered by some of Fatso's head.

Hero bent over to see if Fatso's heart was beating. He was wasting his time. Straightening, he drew his own gun and held it loosely, dangerously.

"Boys," he said, "just let that be a little lesson to you. Somebody's always got more brains than you got. Now, before I call the cops to report old Fatso's suicide, are there any objections if I appoint myself the new boss?"

There wasn't a one.



Det. Lt. J. C. Wilson, Dallas, Tex., entered a restaurant during his first day's duty with the Burglary and Theft Bureau. While he was dining a thief stole his hat.

Sinister Static

In South Bend, Ind., Henry J. Wozniak was watching television with his wife when sudden violent interference began distorting the picture and sound. Puzzled, Wozniak stepped onto the front porch to take a look at his antenna. He quickly found the source of the trouble. The antenna was gone, and he saw a man running down the street with it. Wozniak, incidentally, had reported the theft of hubcaps from his car, to the police, only two days earlier.

Lawn Larceny

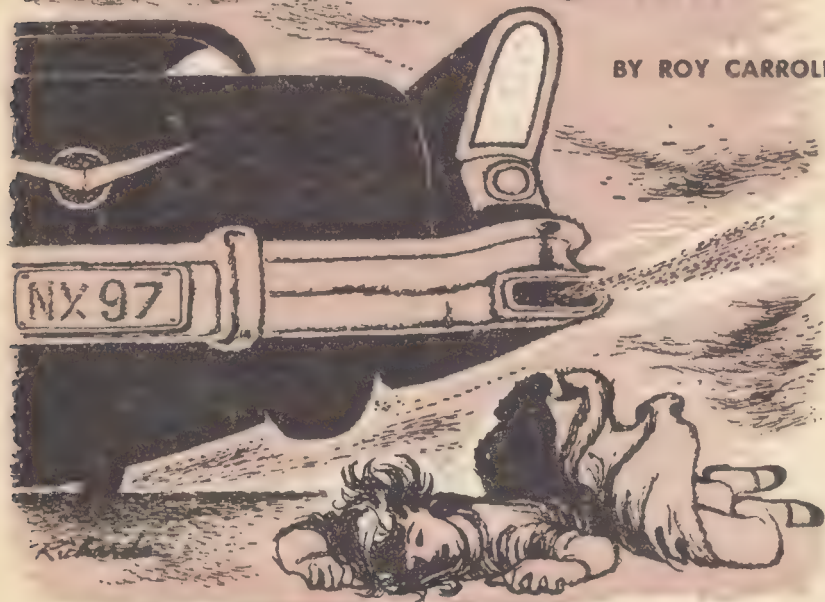
Port Huron, Mich. police thought Ida D. Findlay was kidding when she called headquarters and said someone had stolen her back yard. Investigation, however, disclosed that Miss Findlay's yard was missing—at least all the sod had been stripped from it. Miss Findlay, a nurse, said she had been away from home three days on a case.

Death

Walsh lived for just one thing: to kill. To kill in a very special way...

Wears a Gray Sweater

BY ROY CARROLL



WALSH returned from work later than usual that evening, just at dusk. He drove through the suburbs of Compton, hoping he had forgotten nothing on the list of stuff Edith had asked him to pick up on the way home, and halted the two year old light blue Ford sedan at the intersection just across from his home. He felt

tired. The planned celebration for his daughter Mary Lou's eleventh birthday, which would commence at eight with eager, young, howling, ice cream and cake festivities, would tire him still more. He looked forward to it with resignation.

Traffic streamed by. He turned his headlights on, sat there, idling

the engine. His driveway was directly across the street. A bad place to turn in, especially with early evening traffic the way it was. He watched the cars roar by the intersection, looking for an opening.

"Dad!"

Mary Lou ran down the drive. She had on the blue, frilled party dress Edith had made. Though Walsh could see nothing of her expression, he knew what it would be like. Shining. Eager with anticipation. Did you remember the chocolate ice cream? The favors? You didn't forget the paper caps?

He flagged an arm at her out the window, and some of the tiredness went away.

"Hurry up, Dad!" she called, standing at the curb. "Mom wants to fix the table. They'll all be here. Hurry up."

"Right with you, honey."

Traffic gaped. Walsh knocked the shift into low and started across the street; then applied brakes sharply.

Something blue and dark and fast, with early headlights, came from nowhere, roaring. Mary Lou stepped into the street, waving at her father. She posed momentarily and lifted the edges of her full skirt, showing him how pretty it was, and he screamed at her, helpless in the wild roar from the blue car that did not swerve, did not brake at all—just hit her.

There was no noise, other than the roar of the engine. Mary Lou

did not scream. There was no thump of bone and flesh against steel.

He sickened, his breath gone. He saw her sprawl into the air. He watched her strike against the curb, roll loosely up across his own driveway. The car that hit her was already a half block away, misty purple taillights glaring, still moving dreamlike in the midst of its invincible roar.

Walsh drove heedlessly across the street, parked, leaped from the car and rushed to his daughter. Traffic had lapsed completely; the street was numb and still. There was no sound of slammed doors from the house. Edith hadn't heard.

Mary Lou was dead.

For one awful moment he knelt there, holding the crumpled and suddenly changed body. It hurt him strangely that in that moment he could not think of her as lifeless; he could only think of how her new dress was ruined, and of how this would trouble her. Then he did know.

He started to pick her up; then laid her down. He straightened and stared at his home and something came up inside him—something strong and hellish—something he had never before known. He wanted to kill, maim, destroy. It was a feeling, not wild, crazed—rather an established singleness of purpose, fused like concrete. He turned and ran for his car, climbed behind the wheel and drove off,

gas-pedal thrust against the floor.

The misty purple taillights were still in sight. At that same instant, they vanished.

Woods Boulevard, he thought. All through him there was this horrible patience as he urged the sedan toward the far corner.

He came around into Woods Boulevard neatly and fast. The misty taillights were far on up the road, but *they were there*. That was all he asked.

They wouldn't expect him to follow—anyone to follow. They would imagine it had all happened much too fast. They hadn't hesitated; if anything, they had increased speed the second they struck Mary Lou.

The road was deserted and dark. Woods Boulevard reached like a long slim finger out into the country, away from Compton. It was a hump-backed macadam road, sparsely spotted on either side with small frame houses, and wooded acreage that was gradually vanishing as the town expanded.

They? He realized he had seen more than one shadowed form in the speeding car that had wiped out his daughter's life.

His foot on the accelerator was flat against the floor. He felt insane; he couldn't think. He was unable to dwell on Mary Lou being dead. He knew it and that was all.

The other thing was different. He had to get them. Face to face. This was all he really knew.

He gained on them, but there

was in no real satisfaction in this. He *knew* he would catch them.

The car up there with the misty purple taillights was not even a car to Walsh—and that somebody drove it meant nothing. The car was significant only in that it existed as something he must stop and wipe out.

He went past the closed, stock car race track, off beyond the parking area, to the right, the tall wooden fence pale in the moonlight.

The taillights vanished.

He sped on, took the turn and picked them up again. He was off Woods Boulevard now, on the hard-packed dirt stretch that led to the sand pits. The other car was only a quarter mile away.

They knew he was after them now. He could tell from the way they swerved occasionally with slight loss of control, and knew whoever was driving the other car was giving it everything it had.

The other car crossed a main highway, cut into the narrower dirt stretch that led among pine, oak and willow through the sand pits. Walsh followed, and a moment later his headlights leaped as the sedan rocked in ruts.

They had led him in here purposely. He knew that, too.

There was no sign of the misty purple taillights.

The narrow road curled past low sand hills. He muttered aloud, cursing them now, gunning the

engine. He almost smashed into the looming, dark rear end of the other car. He threw his engine into neutral, flung open the door and leaped out.

"Get him!" somebody said. It was a young voice. There was nervousness in it.

He whirled into someone who clubbed him across the face, with something hard like steel. He grabbed for the person, saw a bull-shouldered figure in a gray turtle-neck sweater, a white, grim face with a sprinkling of pale freckles in the headlights' glare.

Somebody yelled, "You hit her! You take care of him!"

"Don't worry," the one in the yellow sweater said.

"You killed her!" Walsh shouted.

"Get him!"

Arms and a heavy shoulder caught Walsh across the backs of his legs and he went down. He heard a girl call, "Hurry. I want to get home."

"Mash his head," the young male voice said.

Blood was warm on his face, in his eyes.

"Get him good, now. It's gotta be good."

Somebody grunted and he tried to dodge, rolling on the ground, but the hard steel caught him in the neck, just above the shoulder.

"You killed her," Walsh said. "I saw you. You'll never — I'll get you —"

Again he was struck. He came

to his hands and knees, dazed now, unable to think, trying to concentrate.

"God's sake, hit him. Hit him!"

"Hurry up, will you?" the girl called.

He felt the brutal blows, realized them, but that was all. He was really unconscious before he flattened on the sandy ground. Through the welter of futility and blood and darkness, he sensed that they kept hitting him with whatever it was. On the head, on the back, on the head...

"Who's payin' for the drinks back at Molly's?"

"Shut up."

He heard their voices and then for some time he sensed nothing at all.

"Well, he's not hurt as bad as he looks. How he did this to himself — and why — I'll never know. Get him awake. I want to talk to him."

Walsh lay on his back and looked up at the night between shifting branches of trees. He saw the pale sky, the low stars, the thin filtering of a cloud — and the cold image of a bull-shouldered young man wearing a gray turtle neck sweater. He hurt plenty, but there was a kind of laughter inside him, too, as he remembered something else.

"He's come to," a man said.

A bright light glared in Walsh's eyes. He blinked, trying to focus

on a still minutely spinning world.

"All right. Get him on his feet."

"They killed her," Walsh said.

"Yeah. O. K. Let's go."

"Maybe we oughta take him back to headquarters. He looks sick," a man said.

"Stand him up. I want a look at him."

Hands grasped his shoulders, swung him to his feet. He staggered, nearly fell, thinking only of that young freckled face and the gray sweater now. The misty purple taillights still spun through his mind. Nobody prevented him from falling, and he went to his knees.

"He'll get up," one of them said.

Walsh became conscious of shining boots, of brass, and the glare of a car's headlights. They were police. He wondered absently how they had found him?

"Blood and hair smeared on his front left fender," a man called. "Fender's smashed pretty bad, too."

"I want to vomit," another said. "Bring him along. We'll talk to him down at headquarters."

"You know what I'd like to do?"

"Yeah. But we can't."

Walsh got to his feet again, staring at them, wondering what they meant. He reeled, and when he spoke, his voice was blurred, for he couldn't articulate right yet.

"Save it," one of them said with disgust. "You weak-livered, hit-and-run bastards are all the same."

Walsh said, "What do you mean?"

A young man in a brown suit, carrying a felt hat in one hand, with dark hair and pained eyes, stepped up to Walsh. "Look," he said. "Whoever you are. Wait till we get back downtown, then you can tell us all about it and why you didn't stop. Right?"

Walsh grabbed the man's coat lapels, then let go, but stood looking at him. The words began to flow monotonously from his lips as he told them who he was, and what had happened. "Kids," he said. "Young kids, you hear me? I saw them kill her."

The man in the brown suit came to life a little. "Can you prove who you are?"

Walsh nervously got out his wallet, handed the man his identification. He was trembling, watching the other. But he wasn't seeing him. He was seeing something else—a gray sweater.

"Let's head downtown right now," the man said. "This might change things and we'll have to move."

At headquarters, Walsh explained everything and convinced them of his innocence. They cleaned his cuts, bandaged his head, and the brown-suited man took Walsh into an empty room. Walsh sat in a chair at a long table and looked at the man, the careful eyes, expressionless face.

"Like to run over things again with me?" the man asked. "My

name's Adkins. I know what you must be going through, Mr. Walsh."

"You know I'm her father now?"

"Yes. You see, a girl called in, said the man who'd hit the girl out on Seventy-first was in the sand-pits. Said she'd seen it, wouldn't say who she was, and hung up. It's understandable now. Kids. Figured they could maybe swing the guilt over to you. Figured you'd seen them, maybe, and tried to catch them. Just Joe Citizen. They — well —" Adkins moved to a chair across the table and leaned on the arm. "We'd have seen how thin it really was, the way they — well — fixed your car so it would look like the — uh —"

"That's all right," Walsh said. "I'm all right. Say anything you like."

"Yes." Adkins stared at Walsh and frowned; then resumed talking in his mild voice. "Dented your fender, and so on. They didn't explain your being beat up. They figured anything to get us on your tail would be enough. It almost was, you see?" He paused. "Only they didn't know you were the kid's father."

Walsh said nothing. He glanced at the door; then toward Adkins again. He wanted to get out of here, fast.

Adkins cleared his throat, offered Walsh a cigarette. Walsh refused. Adkins lit one, and smoked, watching Walsh.

"What are you thinking about?" Adkins asked.

"When I can go. I want to see my wife."

Adkins smoked. "Look, Mr. Walsh. You say you didn't get a good look at any of them?"

"No. It all happened too quickly. I didn't see anything of them, really — they jumped me."

"They say anything?"

"Just yelling around," Walsh said. "There *was* a girl's voice."

"Trying for a lead," Adkins said, scowling at the floor. "Think back. The moon was up. It was dark, but probably with your car's headlights — Try and remember. Anything — anything at all."

"It was dark. I didn't see anything."

"Your headlights were still on when we got there, Mr. Walsh," Adkins said patiently.

"Oh? Well, I still didn't see anything." He walked around the table, looked at Adkins. "I'd better get on home. Edith — my wife — will want me."

Adkins smoked. Watched. Did not move.

"Look, Walsh. This is a pretty terrible thing, I grant you. I'm sorry about it. I want to do what I can. I wish you'd help me."

"How can I help you?" Walsh said. "I've told you everything I know."

"I'm worried about you," Adkins said, looking at his cigarette.

Walsh tightened his jaw muscles.

"You're not mad enough," Adkins said. "Why, Walsh? Why? Wouldn't you like to get your hands on those kids? Tear them apart?"

It burst past his lips. "Yes!" He cut it off sharply.

"That's what I mean," Adkins said. "See? It's all inside you—along with something else."

"I'm sorry," Walsh said. "I don't know what I'm doing. I—I'd better get on home."

Adkins sighed, ground out the cigarette in an ash tray on the table. "O. K.," he said. "Let's go."

They walked out through the building, down a sloping ramp, and into the parking area.

"You can take your car," Adkins said. "Here it is. We won't have to impound it now." He opened the door on the driver's side and looked at Walsh. "Couple of the boys—they washed it up for you."

Walsh turned quickly away, climbed behind the wheel, started the engine. Adkins slammed the door and Walsh looked out at him.

"Thanks," he said.

"Yeah," Adkins said. "You better get home to your wife. She's not doing so well, Walsh."

He knew they would follow him and they did. He was no more than two blocks from the Police Building when he picked up the cruiser in the rear view mirror, hanging well back, but yet staying close enough not to lose him.

All right. He had that worked out, too. And it wasn't right, maybe, because Adkins had been a good guy. But it didn't matter about how good he'd been. There was something Walsh had to do, and nothing could stop him.

It didn't matter who else had been in the car that had struck Mary Lou. The only person who mattered was the driver. And he knew who the driver was—at least he knew his face, and that gray sweater. He could change the sweater, but not the face. Somehow, Walsh didn't believe he'd bother to change the sweater.

Molly's. Where was *Molly's*?

But that would have to wait, too. First the gun. Not that he would use the gun, really. He had a better idea than that.

He took the shortest route toward his home. Now and then, passing through the streets he had driven over early this evening, thinking about Mary Lou's birthday, he wanted to cry. Something inside wouldn't let him cry.

The police car hung well back, and he made no effort to lose it. He drove home, but parked out front instead of in the driveway. He had to take the chance of Edith hearing him. There was a car in the drive, and one out front. Friends. Lights were lit all through the house.

He wanted badly to be with Edith, but it was impossible. He couldn't wait to do this thing that

rode inside his mind. He had to do it now.

Walking toward the house, across the lawn, he watched, without turning, as the police cruiser slowed before his home, then sped up and drifted away along the street. They wouldn't bother him now. Adkins had suspected plenty. He'd known Walsh was withholding something.

Walsh ran around the side of the house and looked in the front windows, through the bushes. He saw Edith, and Jim Fleming and Jim's wife, sitting on the couch. Edith's eyes were red and she was trying to smile. Bert Lowell came through from the dining room carrying a tray of drinks.

Edith would be all right till he came back. She wouldn't ever have to know what he was going to do. Nobody would ever have to know. But he would never be able to live with himself if he didn't do it.

He softly opened the back door, moved quickly across the porch and through the kitchen to the pantry. He could hear them talking quietly in the living room. He found the gun, a .45 Colt automatic, checked the clip to make sure it was loaded, and hurried softly back out to the car.

As he got behind the wheel, somebody opened the front door of the house. He heard Bert Lowell exclaim, "Hey, somebody's out there! It looks like Irv!"

He drove away fast.

Molly's Tavern was on the outskirts of Compton, not too distant from Woods Boulevard. Walsh had looked it up in the telephone directory, and as he parked out front he was so excited his heart hammered.

He sat there for a moment, looking the place over. It was a road-house, the juke music from inside booming out across the night. Several cars were parked along the dusty stretch of road-shoulder beside the tavern.

He saw nothing of the blue car with the misty purple taillights. But it might be here. Maybe he didn't recognize it.

Through the dirty windows, he saw a bar, and young men and women dancing. It was dimly lighted inside, the red glow from ceiling-high bulbs casting gleams that somehow went with the loud booming music, and the angry-seeming voices inside.

Walsh unfastened his tie, took it off, opened his shirt. He had to keep on his jacket, because the big automatic would be too noticeable in a pants pocket. He ran his fingers through his hair, looking at himself in the rear-view mirror. He looked nasty, all right, what with the bandages and the splotches of iodine.

He went inside. He moved in a kind of haze, through which he searched for the gray sweater. Nobody paid him any attention. It was deafening in the tavern. He

stepped to the bar, elbowed himself between a couple of kids not over high-school age, and ordered a bottle of beer. He paid for it and sipped slowly. Then he stopped.

Suppose this wasn't the right place? Suppose those words he'd overheard at the sand-pit when he was being knocked around by those kids had really meant somebody's house — or some other Molly's place. Maybe not even in Compton.

He drank some more of the beer, carefully checking every person in the room. Flashing-eyed young girls, with tight sweaters and swirling skirts, young men and boys in dungarees and loud-colored shirts, tanned faces with swimming eyes and too-long hair, faces that were excited with whiskey and devil-may-care.

There was no sign of gray sweater.

He waited. He had to wait. There was nothing else he could do.

He began to think about Mary Lou. He tried to control his thinking, switch it away, but he couldn't. He kept hearing her voice, the way she had called to him when he'd come home earlier in the evening. The scene of the car striking her as she attempted to show him her new dress.

He smashed the glass hard down on the bar. It didn't break, but the bartender came over and looked at him, a heavy-cheeked man with

frank eyes, and a clean white shirt.

"Something the matter, mister?"

"No," Walsh said. "Nothing."

He felt frustrated. He had to find those kids.

"What happened to you?" the bartender said. "Not that it's any of my business, but you sure look a mess."

Walsh remembered how he looked, how he should act in a place like this. "I hung one on last night, got in a brawl. Wife's mad."

"I should guess," the bartender said.

"I was supposed to meet a young kid here tonight," Walsh said. "He wanted to buy a car I have for sale. But I don't know his name."

The bartender swabbed the linoleum-covered bar. "I know most the kids hang around my place, here. What's he look like?"

Walsh hunched on the bar, feeling the way his heart kept socking away. "Big guy," he said. "Dark hair — freckles. Big in the shoulders, like a bull. He had on a gray turtle-neck sweater earlier tonight."

The bartender frowned. "You mean Ernie Williams. Yeah. He was in just a while ago. Tying one on, too. He took some kids home. I think he had a date with his girl. He probably won't be back." The bartender leaned across the bar, wadding the bar rag. "That Williams kid's got a sweet little girl, you know? Right now he's probably out in the woods with her, too." He straightened up, looked

around the room; then he went away, as if to a just remembered duty.

Walsh stared at his beer, sick inside now — more so than before. He went to the phone booth and checked the book for Ernest Williams' name, but it wasn't listed. He thought of asking the bartender where the boy lived, but he knew that wasn't the thing to do, either.

He waited. The kids began to thin out, boys and girls paring off, and heading for the door. He drank three beers, trying to keep his mind off Edith, how she was feeling, all alone, wondering where he was. It didn't help. Only he had to find Williams.

He started outside for some air. The place smelled of sweat and stale beer, rank perfume, and head disinfectant.

He was nearly to the door when he heard the bartender call out, "Hey, mister, there's the guy you were looking for!"

It was Williams. Big, bull-shouldered, still wearing the gray turtle-neck sweater, shoving through whirling dancers near the door. A sexy-eyed blonde of about sixteen, wearing skin-tight pale dungarees and a white sweater, clung to Williams' arm.

Walsh started toward them, his hand on the gun in his jacket pocket.

The girl saw Walsh, let go of Williams' arm, said something

and pointed in his direction.

Walsh was up to them now. "Outside," he said to Williams.

"You going to take that from him?" the girl said to Williams.

"Fly away," Williams said to the girl, shoving her toward the bar. "What's with you?" he said to Walsh.

"Outside," Walsh said. He got up close to Williams and rammed the muzzle of the .45 into the young man's side. Williams wasn't drunk, but he was close to it. He stank of whiskey and sweat. His face was sheened with sweat, his eyes shot with blood, the dark hair falling over his forehead. His lips curled downwards.

"Take off," Williams said. "You're drunk."

"Maybe you don't know what this is?" Walsh said, showing Williams the gun as he withdrew it partly from his pocket. "I promise you, I'll kill you right here if you don't get outside."

The girl stood off, looking at them. Williams glanced toward her and winked, then looked at Walsh again, and there was fear in his eyes that he did not want the girl to see.

"All right," he said. "We'll go outside, you want to."

They moved through the door and outside into the dusty parking area. Walsh felt a fine trembling inside his chest, but his hands were steady.

Williams turned and faced him

outside, and he was plainly frightened now.

"Over there," Walsh said. "To that car. You saw that car earlier tonight, Williams."

"What the hell you talking about? I don't know you."

"You want to die right here?"

Williams' face was paler still, but tinged with red from the lights inside the tavern.

"Your girl won't do anything to help you," Walsh said. "Don't you realize that? She's probably on her way home right now. She should be."

"What — what you want?"

"Get in the car, there. Get behind the wheel."

They stood beside Walsh's car. Williams didn't move. The parking area just off the road was very quiet and there was nobody in sight, so Walsh took out the gun and showed it to Williams, muzzle first.

"Get behind the wheel, son. I'm going to kill you. But not right here." Walsh waited a moment and Williams still did not move. "But just the same," Walsh said, "it's up to you. You want to die right here, where your friends can come out and stare at the corpse?"

"You're crazy," Williams said. His voice was low, almost a whisper. "You've flipped."

"In the car," Walsh said.

Williams turned dreamily and slid behind the wheel of the car. Walsh moved rapidly around the

front of the car, keeping the gun on Williams all the time, and got in beside him. He closed the door.

"Start the car and drive where I tell you."

"I don't want to go no place," Williams said.

"You'd better make it snappy," Walsh said. "My patience is running out."

Something in the sound of his voice reached the other, and he started the car and backed off the parking lot. Walsh directed him to the corner and told him to turn left, and then he began talking to him, slowly, each word weighted with emotion, but somehow monotonous, flat.

"You killed my daughter," Walsh said. "You didn't know that, did you? I'm not here because of what you did to me out there in the sand pits. That was nothing. I'm here because you killed my daughter —"

"Daughter?" There was the sound of shock, of understanding in Williams' voice. "Ah, what the hell you talking about?"

"Don't pretend you don't know," Walsh said. "You do know, and we both know it."

Williams was hunched over the wheel. He was big, full-grown, yet Walsh knew he wasn't even eighteen. He was just a kid, and the look of a kid was in his eyes, but that look was mixed and jumbled with a lot of things that added up to heavy experience. Watching him,

Walsh saw the trapped and insecure expression on the boy's face. He knew those big hands were sweating on the wheel, and he knew that under that thick, greased mat of black hair the boy's mind was hard at work for a way out.

"There's no way out for you," Walsh said. "Except the one way. You know what that is. Take your next left and start out Woods Boulevard."

"Listen," Williams said. "What you want to go out there for, for cripes' sake?"

"Do as I say," Walsh told him. "And drive damned careful, because if you make a break of any kind I'll kill you right where you are."

Williams straightened his shoulders, turned and looked at Walsh. Walsh's face was dead white and strained.

"I think you're scared," Williams said. "I don't know what you're talking about, mister. But you're too scared to use that gun."

Walsh held the gun up and squeezed the trigger.

The shocking sound of the explosion in the small confines of the car nearly blew his ear drums. He had aimed directly across the front of Williams' face, out the far window.

The car swerved.

Walsh jammed the gun into the boy's side and shouted at him. "Drive careful, Williams. Next

time you'll get the slug; it won't go out the window."

"I can't hear," Williams said. He whined a little now. He turned and stared at Walsh, shrinking toward the far door of the car. The car swerved again. Walsh's ears were ringing and there was a strong, pungent odor of cordite in the car.

"Turn in at the stock-car race track," Walsh said loudly. "Drive right through the gate in the fence."

Williams slowed the car, began to talk rapidly. "Look, mister—you got this all wrong. I'm sure you got it all wrong."

"You killed her," Walsh said. "You ran her down. You didn't stop. You killed her. I'm going to kill you, Williams."

"No," Williams said. "No, I tell you." He slowed the car still more. "It wasn't me."

"It was you. Turn in here."

Walsh found that he keenly enjoyed the young man's terror. With this realization, he shook himself reproachfully and remembered Edith and Mary Lou, and that Mary Lou was gone forever.

"Drive right inside there," Walsh said, as they came across the parking grounds outside the fence-enclosed race track. Dust funneled behind them, spreading damply out across the night-chilled darkness. They approached the gate. It was ajar. Walsh looked at Williams and Williams was hunched over

the wheel, not mad, not trying anything—on the verge of tears.

Walsh did not feel sorry for Williams. He wanted to kill him now, more than ever before. And he knew Adkins, the cop, had known this, too. It was what had worried Adkins.

They came through the gate.

"Stop the car and get out," Walsh said.

Williams stopped the car, turned off the ignition, but didn't move from under the wheel.

"I said, get out," Walsh told him, jabbing the gun into his side. "Out."

Williams opened the door and stepped out. Walsh slid across the seat and climbed down behind him.

"Walk with me over to the gate," Walsh said.

They walked to the gate, and Walsh fastened it with the long wooden bar. He glanced at the broken padlock on the gate, and mused on how kids like Williams had probably broken it. Maybe Williams himself. He'd read in the papers how kids would come out here late at night and hold drag races. A lot of things had happened out here. Now there was going to be something new happen, and inside Walsh was a high and very wonderful keening of emotion.

He had the feeling of death-dealing. Of omnipotence. He looked at Williams' face, pale in the stark

moonlight that spread like silver around the enclosure of the fence.

"We're all alone in here. Nobody but us," Walsh said. "Isn't that fine?"

Williams just looked at him. He did not speak, did not even try. He stepped backward slightly, staring at Walsh, his eyes wide, his mouth slack, dark hair hanging dank and sweaty across his pale forehead.

"I didn't mean it," Williams said.

"But you did it," Walsh said. He felt composed now, steady, sure of everything. He advanced on Williams. "Look around you, Williams. Look how it is in here. See the bleachers, the way the moonlight strikes them. Did you use to come here often?"

"You're crazy," Williams whispered. "You're crazy."

"No. Not at all. Or, maybe I am. What difference is that to you? I could say the same thing about you. Is it crazy because I'm going to kill you? Is that why you think I'm crazy?"

Williams did not speak. He turned wildly and looked around the vast circumference of moonlit track, fence, the center of grass, the shadowed and silvery bleachers, the signs: COCOA-COLA—PEPSI!—CARLING RED CAP—GEORGE'S GARAGE. Posters were plastered to the fence all around the track. Williams turned and started to run.

"Wait a minute," Walsh said.

Williams didn't stop, running toward the shadows of the fence to the areaway by the bleachers. Walsh lifted the heavy gun and fired twice into the ground near Williams' feet. Williams stopped running, turned and stood waiting.

"Just stand right there," Walsh said. He walked past the car and up to Williams. "I want to be sure you know why you're going to die," he said. "Tell me, do you understand?"

Williams broke now. He moved toward Walsh clumsily, his arms hanging. "Don't," he said. "Don't kill me. I never meant to hit that little girl. I never saw her. She stepped down off the curb that way. I never saw her. It was nearly dark, mister. You can't see good when it's like that. A car's lights were in my eyes."

"There were no cars, just then," Walsh said. "You killed her and you ran, and that's all that matters. You're one crazy kid that'll never kill anybody else."

"Stop it!" Williams yelled. "Stop talking like that! All you can say is kill—kill!"

"Walk through the inside fence, there," Walsh said, pointing to the low, white-washed fence that outlined the inside of the track. "Walk over onto the grass."

"What for?"

"Do it."

Williams sighed, and moaned quietly, then did as Walsh directed. Walsh ran softly back to the car,

climbed under the wheel, started the engine and put the gun on the seat beside him. He shoved the car into gear and roared out across the track. He was satisfied. Williams knew why he would die, and that was all that mattered.

Williams knew everything now. He knew what Walsh was trying to do. He knew *how* he was going to die. For a brief instant, in the flash of the glaring headlights along the edge of the track, he stood rooted, staring.

Then he ran.

Inside the car, Walsh was laughing. He didn't know it, didn't hear the way it burst wildly past his lips, became one with the roar of the engine. All he knew was the urge to *kill—kill—kill*...

He didn't even really see the night out there; he just saw Mary Lou. And the need within him boiled stronger because Williams was trapped. It was Godlike and complete. The high board fence surrounded the track. The tall gates to the pit at the far end were closed, barred from the other side. There was a ten foot barrier in front of the stands and bleachers—and Williams was alone and pursued, like a beetle in a dishpan.

Walsh leaned out the window now.

"Run!" he shouted, slowing the car. "See if you can get away, Williams! I'm going to run you down!"

Williams lurched, stumbled, and fell almost in front of the car. But

Walsh swerved aside, gunned in a vicious circle, and returned at high speed. *Scare him, too.* He felt and heard the splattering as mud and sand ripped beneath his wheels. The feeling of elation and strength grew. The sound of the engine was nepenthe to everything of sorrow inside him. But there was no real sorrow. All he could think of was killing Williams — that kid — that killer.

He bore down on him at full speed. Williams came to his feet, limping painfully now, and ran diagonally across the grassed inner circle of the track, screaming. The headlights glared on the barrier, angled up across the stands, painting the bleachers with silver.

Williams slowed. The car slowed. Williams began running faster, out onto the width of dirt track itself now. The car was directly at his heels.

Walsh saw Williams stagger slightly. He didn't want the boy off his feet when he struck him. He wanted him full of life, bursting with it, running full tilt. He slowed the car, stopped it, said nothing, waited.

Williams hesitated, reeling in the moonlight. He moved slowly along the track looking this way and that, walking jerkily. Still Walsh waited. He waited, and inside he was smiling.

Williams abruptly broke into a frenzied run toward the ten foot barrier in front of the stands.

Walsh waited, watching the light bouncing off the sweater, watching the fine speed that Williams now had. Williams was out of the glare of the headlights now. Walsh knew that in the boy's heart was a promise of escape now. He was going to try and climb the barrier, the only chance he had.

And yet Walsh waited, waited until he was sure that Williams would feel certain of escape. Until that moment when Williams would be saying to himself, *"He didn't mean it after all, that crazy nut. He just wanted to scare me. I'll make the bleachers, then head for home."*

Now Walsh gunned the engine to life. He tramped the gas pedal to the floor and swerved straight at Williams. Williams was almost to the high board barrier in front of the stands.

Walsh drove directly at him, cutting down the track, the speedometer reading thirty — then thirty-five... forty-five... fifty. At fifty-five miles an hour, he bore directly down upon Williams.

He saw the young man leap, hang by his hands to the top of the barrier, frantically trying to climb. He saw the hands slip, tear loose. Williams fell, crouched, then turned with his back against the moonshot barrier in front of the stands.

And Walsh saw Williams' scream, but he didn't hear it. The glare of the headlights became brighter and brighter as he neared Williams. In

another moment he would be a crushed mass of flesh and bone, mingled with wood-slivers and steel.

All Walsh saw was Mary Lou's lifeless, flying body, then Williams' screaming face as the car struck, smashing through the barrier. Walsh rode the brakes and the car rocked to a standstill as long torn strips of wood spun through the night. Walsh shoved himself off the steering wheel, put the car in reverse and backed free onto the track again.

Walsh sensed a fine trembling inside him as he got out of the car and walked around front. In the shattered glare of one remaining headlight, he saw that the boy's body, jammed and caught against the bumper and grille-work, had been dragged when the car had been backed out onto the track. Dark blood clotted the earth.

Over by the entrance gate there was the sound of another car, but Walsh did not look up. He stared at Williams' body with sick eyes. A police cruiser swung into the track and raced around to where Walsh stood.

"Get up," Walsh said softly. "You're free, you hear? It's all right. Go home—" He broke off, knelt beside the body.

The police cruiser stopped nearby. A young girl in tight dungarees

ran toward Walsh as two uniformed cops and a plain-clothes man stepped from the car. The man in plain-clothes was Adkins. The girl's voice was edged with shrill panic. "*Ernie*, it's all right! I saw the gun when he made you go with him. I had to tell them. *Ernie*! I told them everything. We were looking for you when we heard the shots..." And then she stopped talking, could only stare.

"Get up," Walsh said softly, pleading.

One of the uniformed men leaned over Williams, straightened and shook his head. Adkins stopped near Walsh, his face expressionless.

"Get up," Walsh said to the mangled body. And he could see Mary Lou as she must have looked to Williams just before he killed her, and he knew no man could do that purposely. "A car's headlights blinded me." There *had* been another car. His own car, crossing the intersection. And he kept staring down at Williams, knowing he couldn't have done this, either. "*I couldn't* do it, don't you see?"

"You did, though," somebody said.

Walsh came to his feet, turned slowly and moved away.

Adkins motioned to the uniformed cops, then walked after Walsh, scowling.



Zero... Double Zero

She had the system, the guts, the partner, to beat the wheel. But she worked for the house; if they caught her she'd be better off dead . . .

BY STUART FRIEDMAN



“ZERO,” Lynne said.
“Nine, twenty-eight, zero two, fourteen,” Charlie answered quickly, his gaze trailing her lifting pink heels as she walked bare-foot across the scrubbed plank floor.

“Double-zero.”

“Ten, twenty-seven, double-zero, one, thirteen,” he came back, look-

ing away as she came toward him again. It was hot in the shack and Lynne had taken off her dress to walk around in a bra and pink panties. She was blonde, palely tanned and pretty in a fresh, casual way, and she paraded her graceful, sweet-curving young body back and forth past the table where he sat

as if it wasn't a man sitting there.

She drilled him for another half hour, firing numbers at random. She had to be sure he knew the sequence of numbers in a roulette wheel perfectly so that he would know instantly the two flanking numbers on both sides of whatever number she signalled. She had been training him for hours a day for a month. Tonight he would be coming to the Penthouse Casino, where she was a croupier, to launch her system for knocking off the wheel.

"Now, let's hear the whole wheel clockwise, starting with double-zero."

He began to protest: "But I *know*—"

She snapped her fingers, and he reeled off the numbers.

Lynne nodded approval. "Counter-clockwise. Start with..." She paused, chose twenty-four without realizing it was her age. She walked away, listening. Charlie said the numbers, watching her. Sunlight from the open door and the end windows glowed on her sleek, bare body, showing the tremor of motion along the soft flesh of her long, slender legs and the slow, rhythmic tilt and swing of her lithe, femininely rounded hips. His voice fumbled midway around the wheel.

She turned and looked at him from the window. "What's wrong, Charlie?"

"Nothing—I—" He cleared his

throat. She came down the room, her step lazy and soundless. She stood over him, her leg pressed lightly against the front edge of the table, and regarded him worriedly.

"Try again, h'm?" she said in a soft, coaxing voice. "I know you know it by heart." When he failed again, Lynne said sympathetically. "Tired, Charlie? Is that it? It is awfully hot. Maybe I'm overworking you."

"No . . . yes . . . I . . ." He dropped his eyes. "I mean I'm sorry, Miss Vestral, but . . . when you haven't got your dress on..."

"Look up, Charlie." She put a finger under his chin. "And quit that whining. This is big and tough, what we're going to do. You can't go into it cringing. It's not Miss Vestral. I'm Lynne. If my not having my dress on embarrasses you, say it out."

She smiled encouragingly. He was a skimpy, aging man with narrow shoulders, a scrawny neck with a large Adam's apple and nervous protruding eyes. There was something comical and pathetic about his efforts to come up to her expectations. His eyes bulged, his scrawny neck stretched and his sad, shrinking chin tried to thrust manfully.

"I'm a man; you're a woman," he blurted, almost shrilling.

Lynne looked at him in blank silence until he began to squirm and his Adam's apple bobbed.

Abruptly, Lynne turned her back and thrust her bottom toward him. She lurched her hips vulgarly from side to side, looking scornfully across her shoulder at him. She faced him again.

"I give you a chance to stand on your hind legs. But you've got your mind on *that*." She slapped the seat of her panties disgustedly.

He mumbled: "I'm only human."

"Is whining for dimes along Mooch Alley human? And when some big rancher needs his cotton picked—or his manure shoveled—and the cops sweep you onto a truck and turn you over to a master, is that human?"

His eyes began to water. He was such a miserable, pushed-around little guy he made her heart ache. She went around the table, softly contrite.

"I'm sorry, Charlie." She patted his cheek. "You're worried about tonight. Don't be. It'll just be like practice, to get used to each other in actual operation at the wheel. Small stakes. We'll have two weeks till the Oilmen's Convention. The house dusts off the \$100 chips when those boys bluster into town. In that big-money atmosphere we can knock off that wheel for a hundred thousand without screaming for attention like a burglar alarm." She dance-stepped to the middle of the room, rising exultantly on the balls of her feet. "That's the *real* excitement. Not *this*." She stroked her body dis-

dainfully. She came back and stood against the front of the table as if across from him at her wheel in the Penthouse Casino, and spread her hands. "Now for some finger-signal drill. Watching?"

"Yes, but—"

"What? Charlie, if it's a strain to ignore a little flesh, how'll you stand up to the real stress?"

"It's—well, cheating. Should we really go through with it, Miss Ve...Lynne?"

Her eyes widened, narrowed. She went over to her purse on the bunk. She came back and flung a dime on the table.

"Buy a moralistic motto in the dime store and hang it over your bed...if you've got the price of a bed. It'll keep you happy flat on your back. The winners lay down the moral laws for the losers. The same masters that hire the cops to make you shovel their manure have put a cop called conscience inside your skull, on duty 24 hours a day to keep you tame. There's only one law, Charlie. Survival. It says win. It doesn't say how, it it just says win...otherwise you obey the masters who did win and put that cop in your skull. If you like being a loser, Charlie, take the dime and crawl back to Mooch Alley with that cop in your skull."

"I don't mean that, I don't mean that. But what'll they do if...?"

"They catch us?" She shrugged. "I don't know. Why?"

"*Why?*" he almost yelped. "I

heard stories how they caught cheaters and took them across the state line and ...and..."

"Killed them?" She laughed softly. "Well, answer me this, Charlie: Is your life worth living the way it is?"

She thought he looked rather nice as he stepped off the elevator at nine-thirty wearing the casually smart sports outfit she had bought him. He paused to adjust to the change of altitude from Mooch Alley and then came across the Penthouse Casino toward her wheel with an easy, strolling air that made her proud. She had three players and he took a fourth chair and extracted a creaking-new leather wallet.

"How much are the chips, Miss?"

"This is the dollar-minimum wheel."

He tossed a twenty across the layout. "I'll try a stack."

She pushed the stack across, then arched her hand out over the turning roulette wheel, her fingers gracefully poised and steady. As the ball in the numbered slot, where it had fallen last play, rode around to her she plucked it out and started it on a long spin, fast and high in the grooved rim above the wheel.

At the instant the ball left her fingers her eye registered which number was passing her private check point. Then, as her hands began to gather the loose chips

she had taken in last play, two of her fingers quirked.

Her hands seemed to suck Charlie's protruding eyes half out of their sockets. Then he relaxed and bet the two-diget number she had signalled plus four others. The five numbers, though separate on the betting layout, represented a five-slot-wide sector in the wheel.

Girlishly trim in her Penthouse Casino uniform of pine-green velvet slacks and short-sleeved white blouse, her expression imperturbably pleasant, her tanned bare arms looking carefree, she stood and sorted by color and neatly stacked the loose chips. Her composure in the midst of big crowds and heavy, hectic play was one of the reasons she was on the #1 wheel. She took care to maintain that look of unexcitement: her lipstick was quiet, nail polish natural, blonde hair combed cleanly back out of the way and unornamented. She didn't advertise her taste for danger.

Her hands, moving with swift accuracy, worked almost blindly. She glanced down only once or twice, otherwise she maintained steady contact with her players, who required her attention and approval like children. The impression she managed to convey, that she wasn't actually on the other side of the table but bucking the wheel with them, was her greatest asset. The feel of her sympathy kept them playing longer, returning oftener and losing more. In the time just

after her divorce a year ago when she was still clinging to romantic wreckage and her sympathies had been honestly felt she had taken with mourning eyes and bitter mouth the fact that the goodness of genuine warmth was exploitable. Now she kept her eyes wondering wide and her mouth softly relaxed and ready to reflect the various moods of her players, and the counterfeited was more convincing than the real had been, and she liked the irony. She didn't give a damn about any of them any more.

Except poor, little, old pushed-around, never-had-a-chance Charlie. She had first seen him in Mooch Alley and hated him as an outrage against human dignity, a creature stepped-on till the guts were mashed out. She wasn't sure why she had taken him over; maybe maternalism, maybe sadism. Maybe she wanted to heal him and stand him up proud and strong; maybe she really enjoyed his weakness and submissiveness to her superior strength and will.

The ball came down out of the upper groove and moved gradually lower on the banked slope of gleaming wood. Lynne glanced occasionally at it until it was circling almost at the edge of the wheel. Her seemingly aimless attention was on the betting layout when the ball dropped. It was a tribute to her style that players seldom guessed that she was alert against a fast, shifted bet after the ball stopped.

She spotted the ball, touched the tip of her left forefinger to the empty number-square on the layout.

"Number 27," she said in a warm throaty voice.

She raked in Charlie's and the others' losing chips, paid off an Odd bet and a High, matching stacks precisely without counting, and put the ball back into play. Charlie watched her finger-signal hawkishly and made the correct bet.

They lost again.

She shrugged inwardly. The perfection of her system was its imperfection. She was wrong almost seven times out of ten. She could be wrong eight times and still show a profit. Charlie understood. His hands were calm as he lighted a cigarette and waited to make the third bet.

She knew it was going to happen before it happened. The signal number was double-zero. The code was the flicker of her tongue across her lips. Watching her hands, he missed it.

His gaze scurried up, down, retreating from her penetrating, clear green eyes. He spilled ash, swept it guiltily. She watched calmly. He was coming apart at the seams at the first light tug. She smiled on him soothingly and said prettily:

"Passing this time, h'm?"

He grinned sickly. "Think I'll just pass this one. Yeah."

Lynne spotted the ball riding two slots from double-zero and felt a fast-falling sensation in the pit of

her stomach. But her voice was calm as she said:

"Number thirteen."

Her left forefinger touched as briefly and lightly as a dance step on the empty 13-square. If Charlie had caught her signal, thirteen would have been one of the plays. Win, lose or draw she liked thirteen to hit. The world's symbol of Un-luck was her Luck.

He lost again. Then again. He bought another stack. In four more plays at five chips each it was gone. He toppled the third stack as he drew it in. She could see the blood pull out from under his raw-looking sunburn, giving him an odd, unhealthy color. He began to blink and stretch his neck and swallow repeatedly, bobbing his lumpy Adam's apple. Unperturbed, Lynne started another play, signalled. He bet correctly, but she could tell he wasn't sure he was reading her right. Except for that one missed signal he'd been right every time. But he was so conditioned to failure he assumed he was wrong. It was her throw, Lynne knew. Something within her was as nervous as he was, and it disrupted her smooth synchronization. Not much, but enough. It didn't worry her. The percentages would even out.

Confidently, she put the ball in play again, caught the number passing her checkpoint, which was one of the vertical chrome obstacles on the banked slope. Knowing the

wheel perfectly she was able instantly to translate that checkpoint number into the number to be signalled. After months of study and analysis of thousands of plays she had discovered that there was a predictable relationship between the number passing her checkpoint as the ball left her fingers and the winning number. Thirty-four times out of a hundred the ball would finally come to rest within a five-slot-wide sector of the wheel a certain distance from the checkpoint number. The distance was nine-ten-eleven-twelve-thirteen slots to the right of whatever the checkpoint number might be. The number she signalled was the center one of the five.

She had hoped to hone her skills to the needle point accuracy of a single slot. But it was only possible theoretically. Every factor was constant except her throw. The wheel, activated by a mechanism as steady as clockwork, turned at a constant speed. The size and weight of the ball, the smoothness and the degree of angle of the slope, the position of the obstacles, were all the same from play to play. The countless things the ball might do . . . striking obstacles, to veer in erratic arcs, dropping into a slot and bouncing out again, as often happened, being batted by a slot partition in the wheel turning in the opposite direction . . . looked hopelessly chaotic. Besides, she was not permitted to study the ball's action in the

crucial last seconds before it reached the wheel. Yet, the ball was subject to precise, unalterable laws of gravity, momentum, force, counterforce, so that if every factor could be constant it must strike or not strike an obstacle at one particular point and no other, and bounce off at just exactly the same speed and angle, and come to rest finally in one and only one same slot play after play after play. Therefore, if an unimaginably perfect machine could be devised to throw the ball with the same force each time so that it came down out of the upper groove at the same speed and at the precise same point each time the winning number could be foretold. She was no machine. Her normal throw was nine and about a quarter revolutions in the upper groove. The ball came down within an inch or so of the same point when she was functioning at her best. And it was close enough . . . not to hit *one* slot, but one of five, thirty-four times out of a hundred. Ten bets at five dollars a play was fifty, three wins at 35-1 was a hundred and five, plus the three bet on the winning numbers.

The ball slotted. She called the winning number and touched one of Charlie's chips on the betting layout. She pushed a long and a short stack over to him. He grinned like a teased baby. She hit him three more times in a row. Sweat popped out on his forehead and he looked short of breath and his color got

bad. His hands were shaking.

Paul, the cat-eyed floor-manager caught scent of a winner and turned up beside Lynne with a smile like a cramp on his narrow face and stood looking at Charlie. Lynne regarded Charile speculatively for a moment. He'd had stress enough for the first night, without a dose of Paul, whose suspicious-looking face took some getting used to. She tucked a thumb under her palm, meaning: "Cash out."

He took his money and got up staring glassy-eyed and started for the elevator with a faltering air of confusion. She saw him wobble on the way. To a loser, she thought, winning might have the feel of a stab. That cop in his skull might be kicking him around, too. He had money, big money in Mooch Alley terms, and she might never see him again. She almost hoped she wouldn't. He probably wouldn't dare go on a blow-mouth bender in this town, but he might get out of town and do it there. Her name would come into it. She was damned glad she'd been cautious enough to use another name than she was known by here. Lynne Vestral was her real name . . . or had been originally. Everyone in town but Charlie called her by her middle name, Dorothy, and she used her ex-husband's last name.

When she came off her one a. m. rest for the last hour of her shift there was play at the slots, the crap

table, three of the blackjack deals and the cheaper wheels, but only one woman, a house shill, at her wheel. Lynne played her, chatting aimlessly. And although she didn't expect accuracy just after a rest or in the first or last hours of her shift, she read her checkpoint and signalled as usual.

There were spotter stations overhead and peepholes within the scatter pattern of ornaments on the ceiling and column tops. It was rumored that from time to time motion picture cameras recorded the action on every wheel and deal and the film was run off in Big Joe's office and studied in slow motion. The inconspicuous quirks of her fingers signalling would stand out starkly in slow motion. So she always signalled. If the house had a film record and they made a comparison record while Charlie was at the table, there would be no contrast. The motions of her finger would seem habitual little nervous twitches, unaware and meaningless.

At 1:45 Big Joe came out of his office and toward her wheel. A tall, thick-shouldered, black-haired man in his fifties, wearing Western boots, cord pants and Pendleton shirt, he carried himself like a heavyweight fighter. He lived in a showplace in the Sierra foothills and was a big wheel in the Syndicate that owned the Penthouse as well as casinos in Reno and Vegas. He wasn't the tough-mutt gambler,

but one of the new creations of the public relations profession, one of the delicate apes with souls who listened to Hi-Fi, affected the currently fashionable in art and sent their kiddie crops off to the Ivy League colleges. He was well-groomed, soft-spoken and cruel.

He smiled jovially, sat on the player's side and took over the shill's chips.

"Shoo, Annie. Dorothy and I want to be alone." He measured out chips and rapidly bet one each on thirty numbers, leaving only eight empty squares. "Try and miss me," he said, grinning up at Lynne. When the shill left, he asked: "Ready for next week, Dorothy?"

Lynne put the ball in play, finger-signalled right under his nose and smiled. "M'm. h'm. You mean the Oilmen's Convention."

He nodded, watched the circling ball. "We're raising the single-bet limit on this wheel to a thousand. A hundred bucks to those zillionaires is like pennies to you and me. They could hurt us bad. Just think of the chips as nothing but chips, not big money."

"I was here when they were last year."

"Ha! Pay me!" He chortled as one of his numbers hit. "You were here but not as top girl on #1."

She paid him, put the ball in play. "I'll hold up."

"Paul wants to bump you off the evening shift; says a girl'll fluster

with the big crowds, big bets. Not Dorothy, I say; she could walk through a hurricane and keep her hair combed. You'll have assistants, but you run things. Hell, guys don't want to play an ugly man; they'd rather take their licking from a pretty girl. I got every confidence in you . . . Ha! I won again . . . Big Joe never losses! . . ." He turned abruptly, frowning.

Lynne glanced and was startled to see Mrs. Case, a washroom attendant, moving like a specter across the bright Casino toward her wheel. She was old and wretchedly crippled and she came at a stooped, dragging pace with a broom and pan. Her face was so hideously scarred that Lynne could never bear to look directly at it, nor could the woman bear to be looked at, for she always faced the floor. She was toothless and maybe tongueless; she never spoke.

"Get back where you belong, out of sight," Big Joe told her in a low, savage voice. She looked at him in a kind of stuporous panic and worked her mouth. He glared, clenched his fists and moved as if to rise. Mrs. Case turned and started her long, dragging trip back to the washroom.

"Hell, I forgot. I told her to come here." He shrugged and laughed. "I shouldn't have jumped on her. Anyhow, the reason I wanted her to come out was so I could make a little bet with you that you couldn't guess her age. What's your guess?"

Lynne felt her stomach muscles tighten. "You mean to tell me you told her to come out here and be humiliated just . . ."

He patted the air with spread hands. "Calm down. So you'd have bet she's over sixty. Right? You'd have lost. She's thirty-four. Here's her history. Eight years ago she was a blackjack girl. She got into a habit of paying off on losing bets. Had a friend collecting on the other side of the table. Y'know? We caught her. She howled, whined, begged not to be killed. We let her go. Funny thing, though. Later she was in a car smashup that busted nearly every bone in her. She was a long time healing. We got a doc for her. Somehow, some of the drugs or chemicals or something this doc was healing her with gimmicked her brain. Turned her kind of half-witted. Not too blanked out not to know what she's come to, y'know? It's a miracle she doesn't kill herself." He shrugged, smiled, pointed to the slotted ball. "I win again. Imagine! She thought we were crude hoodlums who would kill her. But death is quick, and afterwards they feel nothing. This way—Incidentally, if you think hers is a humiliating lot, you should know about openings we have in some of our other establishments for ex-cheats."

Lynne's face flushed. She let the slotted ball ride and stared at Big Joe's smug, cruel face. "That's horrid." Her voice husked. "Horrid!"

He smiled.

"That horrible example was deliberate," she said, trembling faintly. "For me, wasn't it? I thought you trusted me."

"I do. I do, of course. But I got to wondering, Dorothy, if such a cool doll was really human. Your reaction proves you've got the capacity to feel, no doubt of it." He got up. "That big money could be tempting and you might give way to temptation without thinking it over. Anybody might. And you of all people I wouldn't want to do that. I admire your good mind just the way it is, and..." he slid an approving gaze down her body, "and your lovely body and your pretty face." He started away, paused, and grinned wryly at her, then winked. "That yarn about Mrs. Case was just a joke. Y'know?"

She sped across the straight, flat, desert road. The land began to undulate toward the foothills. She slowed, turned onto a blacktop; after a mile she turned onto a twisting hard dirt road. She pulled up into the yard of the dark shack, wondering if Charlie had caught the bus out here or if he had kept on going. The door was open. She walked across and peered in nervously.

"Charlie?" she whispered.

She heard a stirring. She waited: "Charlie! You there?"

"Oh..." he said. "That you? I

was asleep."

She went in, made out his dim figure, sitting on the bunk. "You all right, Charlie? You looked sick when you left."

"I was a little dizzy. I'm fine, now."

"That's all I wanted to know. See you here tomorrow. Got to get home... I was afraid you'd skipped or..."

"Where to? You're all I got."

"Don't talk like that, Charlie... bye for now." She lingered. "How does it make you feel, to know it's working and you'll have plenty of money and be your own man."

"It feels fine. But, Lynne... afterward... you've said we'd each go our own way. But couldn't it be different, couldn't we meet or...?"

"I don't want a man in my life. Sorry, Charlie."

He reached and found her hand, pressed it, "I got a confession. I was bragging, putting on like I could do anything. I *couldn't* bother you. Oh, Jesus!"

"Hell, there's other things. Don't let it bother you. I'm no-good as a woman, for that matter. Something wrong with me too."

"Not you. You'll find a handsome, young, strong guy, a beautiful, wonderful girl like you, don't you worry. And you'll marry. And if I could just know that I could be maybe in the same town, and see you sometimes... like maybe a relative."

His voice, so earnest and forlorn

in the dark, touched her. "You know something, Charlie? I got nobody else, either. She laughed abruptly. "Christ, we're a helluva pair."

"But we'll stand up on our hind legs and spit in their eye!"

"That's my boy!"

Charlie doubled up the second night, tripled the third. She had him on ten-dollar chips the fourth night. They were smoothing out with each other and winning consistently. He had learned not to bug his eyes so obviously toward her signals. She had shifted the tongue-signal for double-zero down to her hands.

She pulled up at the shack in the afternoon a week later, and sailed inside. He stood and grinned, then seeing her expression began to back off. She spurted, swung her arm, cracking her palm against his cheek. She hit with the other hand. He stumbled back, sat on the bunk, caught her hand as she swung a third time. His eyes bulged up at her as she stood over him, panting with anger. Suddenly he drew her palm to his face and kissed it twice.

She stood letting him do it, then wrenched back.

"You dog!" she hissed. "Kissing the hand that hits you. You don't even ask why. You just take it!"

"I love..."

"Don't you dare say it. Petty thief! I gave you thirty dollars for good shoes and some socks. Trusted

you to take care of that much of your wardrobe." She kicked his shoe with her sandal. "How much you pay for those shoes?"

He looked down. She yanked his head up. "Seven."

"Paul, the floor manager, thinks he's sharp. He spotted those shoes, tabbed you a nobody with temporary money, not solid, backed-up money. You thief! You endanger everything for a measly fifteen-twenty dollars. Buy new shoes this afternoon. Hear?"

"Yes."

"You make me *sick*. 'You're all I've got.'" she mimicked. She snuffed, turned away, her eyes suddenly burning with tears. She spun at him, demanded. "Why? Tell me WHY you'd let me down like that?"

"I wanted—" he cleared his throat. "—wanted to buy you a present."

"Ha!" she said contemptuously. "Steal from me to buy me a present." She snapped her fingers. "Well, where is it?"

"I didn't buy one. It'd be dirty, a thing like me...courting a girl like you."

"Oh, brother, would I be touched if I didn't know it was a damned lie. You just plain stole the money."

"Well...yes. But that was days and days ago...and now." He looked at her compellingly. "Now, I wouldn't. Honest."

She studied him. "I believe you. I almost believe you," she said.

"Never mind. Now listen. You know I'm off tonight and tomorrow night. Here's what you're to do. Take two hundred and lose it, both nights. Four hundred total. They've begun to notice you, so they'll see you're playing against the wheel itself, not just against me. Last night I think they had a detective studying the pattern of your play. So keep on playing a five-slot-wide sector in the wheel. Vary it now and then with a chip on Black or Red, Odd or Even, High or Low. But when you play numbers always play five, as you have been, which are side by side in the wheel. Only you choose what five to play. And play *after* the ball is started. Lot of players do. In itself it's not suspicious but it would be if you only did it when I'm on the wheel. You got it?"

"Yes. I understand. But what if I win?"

"Better yet. I wish you'd get lucky. It'd show you don't just beat me."

And damned if he didn't walk up there in his new shoes and hit Paul himself for five hundred.

They met at the shack the afternoon the oilmen hit town.

She was silent and tense as they counted the money once, twice. There was over ten thousand, and all but a few hundred of it winnings.

She took out a heavy long manila envelope stamped airmail, special delivery and addressed to Lynne

Vestral, Hotel Ambassador, Los Angeles.

"After we win," she said, "and I pay you in chips, go to the cashier. Get a check for your half, made out to you. Put the rest of the cash in here..." indicating the envelope. "...seal it and drop it into the mail chute beside the elevator. You'll do that? I can trust you not to try anything funny?" She stared into his eyes for several moments. "All right. You could take your half in cash too, but a check's safer. Then, do what you please. Now I've got to get back home; I'm nervous, I need a nap. Tonight's IT. Just listen. There's a slight change. I'll sharpshoot. I'll *know* the instant the ball leaves my fingers if the throw is dependably accurate. If it's off—and it may be—I won't signal and you won't play. Got it? You buy one stack of \$500 chips."

"\$500 chips! Use the whole ten thousand on one stack?" He drew a long breath and let it out in a moaning "Whew-w-w-w-w."

"It tenses me up too, Charlie. But we can't drag it out. We've hit them enough already so that they're watching. I want it done. You'll have four plays. On one you'll hit for \$17,500, plus the \$500 bet on the winning chip. Your next play is for \$1000 per number."

"Five thousand a crack?"

"Yes, and if I don't hit in three times—but I *will*. Then you'll win twice more. That's three \$35,000 wins in all plus the \$17,500 win."

"Way over our hundred thousand."

"Yeah." She laughed. "It'll cost 'em a little extra for putting us through too much stress. Oh, Good God. I forgot. I *signal* every play. I have to move my fingers the same natural-looking way every time. But you ignore the signal and do not play unless my wrists go up like this. See? Like this. Get it. That means play, and only that." She pulled a breath, straightened up, stuck out her hand. He took her hand solemnly, and they shook. She nodded tersely and went out to her car.

There was always a tone of tension about the Penthouse Casino; even the illumination was the color of lightning. By nine o'clock the pitch was high and keen, the crowd big and lusty and on the move, the men, boisterous, laughing, shouting, drinking; the women, including a few, sexy hot-eyed convention girls, shrilling and chittering and bright with excitement. The music from the Sky Club band at the front end of the casino stopped and although Lynne was usually deaf to it she became aware of the voice din and the rumbling clunk-clank-clatter of slot machines and the chirp-chink-click of silver money and chips at the wheels and deals. The color of clothes and the glitter of casino fixtures and feminine ornaments and the vivid green baize on her layout and on the half-round blackjack

tables and the gleam of the table banks with their scores of stacks a hundred silver dollars high stabbed acutely at her vision. Charlie was due in twenty minutes, and there was no chair, nor even comfortable standing room for him.

There were a dozen men crowded around, whooping and jostling and playing with big stacks of silver dollars while they smirked and flirted with her and joked with each other. She parried them with teasy smiles and kept the play moving and her fingers signalling but she had a queer sensation that the solid floor was slowly crumbling beneath her feet. It had taken months of work and practice to integrate all the separate skills of her hand, eye, nerve, muscle into a single, reflex-quick whole of machine-like dependability. Now, she became aware of all the single elements, as if the whole were disintegrating. She began to have difficulty in reading the upside-down number as it passed her checkpoint, and suddenly she didn't know how she had ever learned not only to read the number but to time it precisely to the instant the ball lost contact with her fingers. Her throw became self-conscious and instead of her normal, natural nine and a quarter revolutions in the upper groove, it went sometimes eight sometimes ten. She began to have to count off a slow slot at a time the eleven spaces from checkpoint number to signal number...and she was not

precisely sure of the sequence of numbers. She felt panicky. She started visibly as Paul tapped her arm.

"Time for your rest period."

"Oh...oh, sure. Thanks."

She went toward the kitchen service entrance, weaving through the crowds deftly, a smile automatically lifting her lips as she met glances. The Sky Club band burst out with a jumpy tune. Caught off-guard and passive the sound came at her like a fine brush that darted in rapid, teasing strokes against the soft flesh of her belly, into her navel and over her breasts. The agitated music thrust at her, its rhythm in clash with her sinuous flow. She pushed back at her light blonde hair with a nervous flutter of fingers. The tips were cold. Her back and stomach muscles tightened, resisting, and after another step she was moving at her own pace, her lithe hips and slender legs swinging, graceful in the pine-green velvet slacks, her young body proudly erect, controlled. She glanced at the writhing of the dancers down in the Sky Club scornfully as she turned into the kitchen.

She went outside to an areaway, set with tables and chairs, that ran around three sides of the Penthouse Casino. She found a dark place along a line of empty tables, set her cup of black coffee down and lighted a cigarette. She sipped coffee, then leaned her forearms on the parapet and stared out from the

roof past the little pinch of lighted space which was The Big Little City That Never Sleeps and into the vastness and darkness of the desert. The night was moonless and deep. She stood back and lifted her face to the brilliant profusion of stars. She stood in that attitude for some moments, waiting. Waiting for some feeling, some wistfulness or sense of poignancy or even mourning because the person she had been had had to die before she could have become what she was now, a cheat, a thief, a cold fraud of a woman. It was romantic posturing, and slightly grotesque against the muted background of racebeat music. All she felt was the need of more coffee and another drag of her cigarette.

She shrugged. She didn't give a damn. Why should she want to surrender to starlight or anything or anyone else. Surrender was a slave ideal, a loser's delight. It belonged with the cop in the skull, dead! The law of survival said only WIN, it didn't say how. And damned if she was going to let herself go to pieces. She was going to go back to that wheel and stay in complete, icy control of herself.

Charlie arrived on schedule at nine-twenty. He burrowed through the crowd and lay down ten one-thousand dollar bills and one of the chair players said:

"Oh, Jesus, let a *man* play. I'm a boy." He bowed and gave Charlie his seat. Charlie was ready.

Ready ready ready ready
READY.

It felt right the very first spin. She signalled and lifted her wrists and Charlie solemnly lay out five \$500 chips.

It was ironical. She'd counted on big-money play, but the millionaires were playing dollars and the man from Mooch Alley thousands. She gave Charlie a smile of genuine amusement. He blinked, swallowed and came up with a grin.

"You must be feeling lucky again tonight."

"Oh, this is my lucky night."

The ball dropped. Lynne touched her forefinger to one of his chips. "Number 13...well, you are lucky."

"How much he sock you for, girlie."

She smiled down, counted out seventeen \$1000 chips, one \$500 chip. "Seventeen thousand, five hundred."

"Kee-rist, a day's wage!"

The crowd guffawed and watched Charlie. Lynne put the ball in play. Her throw was off. She signalled without lifting her wrists.

"What're you playing this time, Mac?"

"Can't seem to get the right feel this time."

On the next play her wrists went up. There were several bets on the board, but when Charlie began laying out \$1000 chips, two of the men switched their bets, played Charlie's plays. Wallets came out. A perfect avalanche of \$100 bills

began to appear, and Charlie's bets were buried. The croupier standing by to help Lynne became flustered trying to keep track of them. Lynne saw Paul edge in and stand by the other croupier. With them watching the layout Lynne permitted herself to watch the ball.

Her heart came up in her mouth as the ball fell. There was a huge, bellowing shouting and laughter. "We HIT!"

Indeed, they had. It took a long time to make the payoffs, including Charlie's \$35,000. Several of the men began to caution her.

"Wait...we've gotta cash some checks and buy some of them big chips..."

The play stopped. Four men went to the cashier, trooped back and bought stacks of \$100 chips. Paul had taken over as her help. Big Joe drifted over with a wide, bland smile. Not a chip was bet. Everybody watched Charlie. She knew her throw would be off after the delay. She didn't lift her wrists. Charlie shrugged.

"I don't get the feeling just right this time."

"That's all right, man, just leave us know when you *got* that feel."

Somebody touched him for luck. Big Joe chuckled jovially and came around to stand on Lynne's other side. Wedged between him and Paul, she was surprised that she didn't feel more edgy. Instead, she felt an almost shivering exultance. The challenge, the feel of their

threat. Ah! but that was the real thrill. There was a dulling of the sounds in the casino. She was a little startled to see the crowd around the wheel; people were coming from every direction. A murmur ran through it, people questioning others; word of what was happening wildfired through the place.

The ball dropped, not a dollar had been bet. She put it in play again. It was right!

She signalled, lifted her wrists. Charlie, sensing the spotlight he was in showed a fine, high streak of ham. He lay down those \$1000 chips deliberately. The other players rushed in to cover his chips, following his lead exactly.

She got a look at Big Joe's mouth, off-guard and gaped for an instant as the ball dropped for a win. It hit the house, but hard. She and Paul busied themselves for over two minutes, paying off. The men around him were almost breaking little old Charlie's back with slaps. Waitresses hustled down with orders of highballs. Charlie refused all drinks thrust at him. The layout began to take on the feel of a bar.

Just one more time, she thought, as she plucked the ball out of the wheel. The sound of the Sky Club band, distant and loud against the strange hush in the casino, touched her again like a frenzied brush against her belly and breasts and a thrill ran like a quick, fierce current over her skin from the tips of her

suddenly curled toes to her scalp. She caught her breath and the ball went sailing wildly clear out of the wheel. Guffaws of laughter went up and somebody scrambled to retrieve it, although she had spares.

"Let Paul take over. You're nervous, dear," Big Joe said.

"I'm fine."

Big Joe's voice became low and gritty. "I said let Paul spin the ball."

Charlie's sudden movement startled her. "What kind of piker deal is this, because we're winning you're taking it out on this poor girl."

The other players joined him in his indignation.

"Now, now," Big Joe patted the air with his spread hands.

"Maybe he wants to close down the wheel when we're winning. Some pikers."

"Gentlemen, you misunderstand. I thought the girl needed a rest... she was nervous."

She grinned into his eyes defiantly. "I'm fine, fine. I'll try to win for the house this time, Big Joe."

He laughed, but his eyes hated her. "Round and around she goes... where she stops nobody knows. Play ball. The house is good for it, men."

She spun it and it was right, and her fingers signalled, her wrists went up, the big bets went down. She and everybody else watched the ball, only the ball. Charlie was neither standing nor sitting, but poised midway, staring and un-

breathing, hands clenched.

The ball came down onto the slope. It missed the obstacles. It slowed, circled nearer and nearer the turning wheel. It rode, hovering just above the edge. It dropped into a slot, came out in a slow, neat arc and came finally to rest.

Charlie gasped and sat down weakly. Big Joe clenched his jaw and walked toward the cashier's office. The blood was throbbing hazily before her eyes, and her finger trembled as she placed it on one of the winning stacks.

"I'm done, I'm done," Charlie said as she spoke the winning number.

"Take over, Paul. I can't throw again tonight."

She left the wheel. A crowd lined up at the cashier's. Charlie was third in line. She caught a passing waitress, took a highball and drank it off.

"What a nerve . . . pay me."

"Go to hell," she said dully. Her head ached.

Charlie walked slowly to the mail chute. He stood by it and tongued the flap of the envelope. He sealed it carefully, dropped it into the slot. Then he went white, grimaced, sucked air and collapsed.

She waited in Big Joe's office. Charlie had been taken to the hotel.

Big Joe came in, finally, shaking his head. "Poor little bastard."

"What happened?"

"Ticker. He's a goner." Joe

opened the French doors onto his private balcony. "He's asking for Lynne. Whoever she is. It's a shame, dying alone. She must be very important to him . . . especially at the end." He sighed, looked out across the desert. "Death. It must be awful to know you're going and to have to go alone." There was a mourning softness in his voice. "He sent half his winnings to this Lynne . . . Lynne Vestral. She's not here . . . not here to hold his hand, to make the end a little less terrifying and sad . . . poor little guy . . ."

He came in off the balcony, shaking his head and peered at her unhappily.

Charlie dying . . . dying alone, and calling for her . . . Oh, God! She was all he had and she had killed him . . . her scheme, the unbearable tension of her scheme . . . she had killed him! Her underlip began to quiver . . . she was all he had, and he was calling for her. She could feel a warm, swelling pressure under her breastbone, a choking tightness in her throat. She cried out in an anguished voice:

"I've got to go down there!"

She rushed for the door.

With startling speed Big Joe intercepted her, reached the door and locked it. He faced her.

"So I hit the number. You *are* Lynne Vestral!"

She gaped at him, stunned. "Then . . . he's not dying!"

"Not till I catch him, no. He fainted, got away when they re-

vived him. You didn't get away." He took a step toward her, and she backed off instinctively. He kept coming, his head lowered, the muscles of his cheeks tight with suppressed violence. She kept retreating until she found herself on the balcony. "Nobody had brains enough to figure him anything but fool-lucky; nobody really thought you were stabbing us in the back. Even when I saw he was splitting his winnings with this Lynne Vestral I shrugged it . . . maybe he loved her, maybe she staked him. *You* I didn't suspect. But, *why* didn't he tip you? Winners tip. Partners, no."

Lynne felt the backs of her legs strike the low railing. In panic her gaze darted back and down to the dark expanse of pavement in the empty parking lot eight floors below. Her knees and the muscles of her thighs began to tremble weakly. He stood, an arrogant shadowy figure towering over her, an arm's reach away. She stepped warily sideward, inching over till she felt the good solid wall at her shoulder. She turned and got her back safely against the wall and waited, watching for a chance to run past him.

He had played on her sympathy, roused that conscience cop in her skull, scrambled her wits. She had to think . . . think.

His voice chopped. "You're Lynne Vestral! I'll prove it. I'll set detectives backtracking your life to your birth certificate, and every dol-

lar more I spend over and above what you cost me tonight will make me that much madder." He feigned a lunge at her. She gasped, ducked.

He laughed coarsely. "You so goddam stupid I got to beat it out of you? That how you want it?" He seized her forearm, gripped it till she had to suck breath to keep from gasping out in pain. "Feel it? And that's nothing! You've got sense enough to know that."

He could prove she was Lynne Vestral. It was pointless to hold out, infuriating him more.

"You win!"

"A-a-h!" He laughed, softly, and there was real pleasure in the sound and she loathed him. "Nobody else could have done it. It took Big Joe to outbrain you, baby. Now here's what you'll do. Get that money back from your buddy . . . plus your own share . . ."

"All right." She spat it out. "Every cent. You'll get it."

"You're going to keep your job and those smart little hands of yours will sharpshoot *for* the house whenever we're in a tight spot. Now . . . peel."

"What!"

"I said peel. Strip. Naked. No more hands-offing, high-tailing Big Joe, baby. I ain't going to cripple up that body. I'm going to use it just like it is. *Peel*. The new skill you're going to learn is, please your master."

"Please..." she said in a mewling little voice.

"That's the sound I like."

"I'd jump first..."

"Go on."

He stood waiting, arrogant. She let herself sink, wilting and moaning softly, to her knees. In that attitude she turned her face up and whispered. "Master..." She curved a hand around his boot and stroked upward toward his thigh.

In the shadowy light she could see the eager, triumphant spread of his grin. She covered her face, pressed her palms hard against her bare eyeballs forcing the salty moisture of tears to stream down her face. She sat on one hip, turned her face up to him, again took his leg.

"I like that, baby." His voice was tensely soft, excited.

She leaned her upper body toward the railing. She lay her face sidewise on his leg just above the

knee, got her legs in position under her. Then, her left hand gripping the top of the railing, her right clutching an upright bar under him, she hurled herself upwards, driving with her legs, pulling with her arms, and butted his chest. He toppled backwards, off balance, and she crouched watching as he floundered out into space, a dead man on his way.

He struck concrete headfirst and he didn't move.

"Bye-bye, Master!"

She would have to stay in town another day, give the police a good story. She smiled as she went out in the office, combed her hair, repaired her makeup.

She unlocked the office door. She moved out into the casino, her pretty face coolly composed into lines of distress, the cop in her skull dead for keeps.



Happy Victim

Burglars in San Fernando, Calif. chopped a doorway into the rear of a liquor store and took merchandise valued at about \$600. The calm store owner looked at the hole in the building and told police: "That's all right. I have always wanted a back door in the place."

Let The Buyer Beware

When revenue agents raided an illegal still near Charleston, W. Va. recently, they noticed one of the bootleggers drinking from a bottle of wine. "How come you're drinking wine, when you have all this whisky?" one of the agents asked. "Think I'm crazy enough to drink that stuff?" the bootlegger replied.

Naked Petey

BY JACK Q. LYNN

*Keep the negatives from Patrolman
Wedge and they were safe. Safe?
Hell, they never had it so good!*



THE beat cop was in our neighborhood four months and we knew plenty about him. His name was Harry Wedge. He was big and ugly with his uniformed belly sticking out, a wise mouth, and an eye for the young chicks. He looked soft. He wasn't. He was hard and mean, and tough kids didn't scare him. He used his stick plenty, split skulls.

That's why we had to get rid of him, fast.

I gave it lots of thought over that weekend until I had it all laid out in my mind.

Monday morning, we waited in Petey's flat for Wedge to come swinging past the place. Zoomer was at the window; me and Petey were on the couch. I'd decided to use her cause she's a nice-looking chick, stacked up real good, and Harry Wedge had been giving her the big eye ever since he hit the neighborhood.

Nobody talked. Finally, Zoomer turned from the window.

"Here he comes, Click."

I jumped up and went over to the window and looked down. We were on the second floor and I could see Wedge real good. He was coming along easy, looking this way and that, and I had an idea who he was looking for. I twisted my head and looked at her. She was at the door, waiting for the word.

"Get him, Petey."

She went out. Me and Zoomer stayed at the window to watch the play.

When Petey hit the front steps, it was just like I'd figured. Wedge pulled up short and started gabbing with her. And all the time they talked, he kept shifting his weight from one foot to the other and throwing looks around him, like maybe he had a big idea, but wasn't quite sure what to do with it. Then suddenly he grabbed Petey's arm and leaned in close to

her. His mouth was going fast. She threw back her head and laughed once, then shrugged her shoulders and came back up the steps to the house. Wedge tally-hoed right behind her. We heard the front door open and close and their footsteps on the stairs.

I nudged Zoomer with my elbow. "Duck."

We crossed to the kitchen. Zoomer jerked out his .32 and grinned at me. I knew he wanted to use the rod bad, but I shook my head no, and checked my camera once more.

Petey and Wedge came into the flat. "...awful big hurry," Petey was saying. "I never like to rush these things."

"This one you're gonna rush, kid."

"Okay, okay. Where's the five?"

"No dough."

"What?"

"Look, kid, do I have to bust your head?"

"Jeez, don't hit me."

"Then quit stallin. Let's go."

I heard them go into the bedroom. I looked at Zoomer. He was tight; his face was set, his eyes narrow and black. He was gripping the .32 hard. I winked at him. We waited. I wanted to give Petey enough time. Finally, I eased over to the kitchen door. The front room was empty and across it the bedroom door was three-quarters shut. Zoomer was beside me. I nodded and we crossed the front

room on silent feet, and then we stood side by side in front of the bedroom door. Zoomer leveled his .32 on the door. I brought the camera up to my eye.

"Okay," I said softly.

Zoomer kicked the door wide open.

Petey was stripped and she had Wedge right where he was supposed to be. I shot in rapid sequence. At first, Wedge was one surprised cop and then he was full of hate and fire. But he didn't move a muscle cause Zoomer said quietly, "Move one toe, Uncle, and you're dead."

I got two more shots. "Okay. Finished."

Zoomer said, "Off the sack, Uncle."

Wedge moved then. He got off the bed slow and adjusted his clothes. But his eyes didn't leave my face. I looked right back at him. "No more busted heads, Uncle, or the prints go straight to the Commissioner. Got it?"

"Screw you."

Zoomer pleaded, "Let me kill him, Click."

"Easy," I said.

"Out of my way, punks," Wedge snarled.

He plowed past us and walked out of the flat.

I doubt if he was ever closer to death than at that moment. Zoomer had his .32 up high and lined on his back when I reached out with one hand and took down his arm.

"Jeez, Click, what's the matter with you?"

"What would we do with a dead cop?"

"I know what I can do with him alive."

It was Petey from the bed. I looked at her. Her eyes were funny, and she was smiling cozily. She said, "You know, for an old man he wasn't—"

That was as far as she got. Zoomer was on her quick. He wrapped one hand in her red hair and jerked back her head and whipped the .32 across her face. And before I could put down my camera and get to him, he was on top of her, pounding her belly viciously with his fists. I'd never seen him so mad.

I hooked one arm around his neck and pulled him off and shoved him into the front room. "Now why didja do that?"

"Her and that goddamn cop!" he rasped.

"It was the setup."

"She didn't have to go all the way."

"Yes, she did."

He didn't say anything then. He just stood there steaming. I knew what his trouble was, of course. Petey was his deb and he was having a lot of bad thoughts about her and Wedge. But for my green, he was crying over spilled blood.

"It had to be that way," I said.

"Yeah? What we got?"

I gave him a puzzled eye. "I

don't follow you, man."

"You got some hot negatives. So?"

"We got a cop right where the hair is short."

"Crap."

I took a deep breath. "Look, man, we'll get him in time. But we don't do it while he's a cop. That's too much heat. We send some prints to the Commissioner. Then we wait until Uncle is plain John Citizen. After that—" I shrugged, "who knows what can happen to a John Citizen?"

"I'm gonna kill him."

"Naw, man, we don't kill him. We just cut him up in the right places. You know, take the pleasure out of life. Let the bastard suffer and remember. See?" I slapped Zoomer's face gently. "Now go take care of your chick while I stomp over to my place and see what we've got."

I went back into the bedroom and got my camera. Petey was sprawled flat on the bed. There was a deep, red gash across her left cheek. And her color wasn't good.

I looked at Zoomer.

He shrugged. "What didja want me to do, tickle her?"

I blotted out the remainder of the morning in my basement darkroom. The negatives were hot material. Pulling them out of the acid fix bath, I held them against a light and studied them. Wedge's mug was in each. So was Petey's. Plus a curving length of naked

body that left little to the imagination.

I put the negatives in water and let them wash good. Then I pinned them up with clothespins and waited, the door locked. I wasn't leaving them. Wedge would want them too much.

When they were dry I took the negs upstairs with me to my sister's flat and hid them. She and her old man were out. I grabbed some food and then I flopped into a deep chair. The chair felt good. I fell asleep and didn't wake until the harsh jangle of the telephone raised me.

It was Petey, and I didn't have to see her to know she was scared silly.

"Zoomer's dead!" she screamed in my ear.

"What?"

"Oh, God, it's awful, Click. He's all mashed up on the street!"

"Where are you?" I shouted.

"My place. He fell off a roof. Couple buildings from his own."

I slammed down the receiver.

There was plenty of activity in front of the place, big crowd, cops, and a wagon. Two guys in white coats were scraping Zoomer off the street.

I felt my stomach churn and turned away and stopped dead. Harry Wedge was standing spread-legged in front of me, big and ugly and mean.

"Just like a wet grape under a big thumb, huh, punk?" he said.

"You got a good eyeful?"

I didn't say anything.

He tapped me on the shoulder with his stick. "Maybe *you* should be scared, huh? You and that Petey-kid."

I was. I bolted out of the crowd and over to Petey's pad.

She was in bad shape, shaking like a wet pup on a winter day. I said, "Zoomer never fell."

She nodded. No one had seen it happen, of course. But we knew Wedge. Zoomer's .38 hadn't done him a damn bit of good.

"Okay, chick," I said. "Let's tally-ho."

"Where?"

"I've gotta make prints. The sooner the better."

"But —"

"Do you wanna stay here alone?"

She flew out of the room and she didn't bother to close the bedroom door. I watched her skin out of her wrapper. She looked bad. The left side of her face was puffed up and she had a big piece of white tape plastered under her eye. The color of her belly skin between her pants and bra was an ugly mixture of black and blue and yellow. She wiggled into skintight jeans and pulled a thin sweater over her head.

Petey went into the darkroom with me. Watching me print, she said, "What good are these now? That cop ain't gonna —"

"We don't fry him while he's a cop, chick. That's out."

"So the head man throws these things in a trash can. Then what we got?"

I turned it over in my mind. It didn't look good. "I dunno, I dunno. Maybe we hit out of town."

"How 'bout if we don't send the prints to him?"

"Huh?" I grunted, looked at her.

She was smiling. "Maybe we cash in."

"Feed me, chick."

"How much you figure Wedge's take is every day? I mean from the cats."

"Hell, I don't know."

"I'll bet it's sweet. And I'll bet it wouldn't be worth a damn if the head man stripped the blue coat off him."

"Chick, you're talking riddles."

"Jeez, man, think. Wedge is getting a cut from the cats. With these pixs we get a cut from Wedge. Say, a bill a week. Get it?"

I stared at Petey. Petey was excited, but Petey was making sense. Harry Wedge hadn't been in the neighborhood two days and he was walking into Mother Nixon's house over on Forty-fourth Street just like it was Hood's corner drug. Five percent of every week's take was what he wanted or he brought in the vice boys. Mother Nixon's front door was still open. It looked like a sweet setup — except for one thing.

"Maybe we fall off a roof, like Zoomer. Or get hit by a truck."

She shook her head slowly. "I

don't think so. Not so long as he can't get his hands on those things and we stick together."

Yeah, she'd been thinking real good. I could see where this could be a neat score.

I finished printing the pictures, put the 8 x 10 prints in a large envelope and the negatives in a small white envelope.

"We gotta find a nice, safe place for these things," I said, tapping the small envelope. Upstairs was okay for a temporary place, but not for maybe forever.

"My place," Petey said. "I'll show you. In the john."

"Some place!"

She laughed. "It's where the bricks are loose, up high near the ventilator. Come on."

She went out of the darkroom. She made sure Wedge wasn't around, then I came out. We moved fast. Her hiding place was the best.

"Okay, let's go find Uncle Wedge," I said.

"We won't find him tonight," Petey said. "He's a day cop. We gotta wait 'till morning."

"Yeah. Sure. That's right." I wasn't thinking so good."

"We'll go up on the roof."

I said, "Roof?"

"Or stay here. We better hang together, Click, like I said, 'till we see this bastard. If he'd happen to catch one of us alone..."

I nodded.

Petey closed the door behind us

and we stretched out on the mattress, side by side.

"Neat," I said.

"Yeah."

We laid there a long time without talking, staring up at the stars. I thought about Wedge and how we had him boxed, but good. This Petey is cagey, I decided. Real cagey. I thought about her. She was a nice-looking chick, stacked up real nice. But I'd never fooled with her cause she'd been Zoomer's deb. Flopped there beside her, though, a guy couldn't help getting ideas. She'd looked pretty good this afternoon even with a yellow and blue belly.

I turned up on my side and slid my hand under her thin sweater. I felt her body jerk.

"What the hell you think you're doing?" she snapped.

"It's gonna be a long night, Petey."

She pushed my hand away. "I'm thinking."

"Me too."

"I'm thinking about that bastard Wedge."

I felt my belly tighten, and I turned away from her.

Morning came around in a hurry. When I opened my eyes, the sun was already a hot, hazy ball in the sky behind me. I turned over. No Petey. Raising up on one elbow, I looked across the room and saw her standing by the window, looking down at the street.

"Jeez, I'm hungry," I said.

She laughed. "For what, Click?" "Money and food."

"Let's go," she said, laughing again. In the kitchen she scraped up some food. After that we went down to the front stoop to wait for Wedge.

He came along the street about fifteen minutes later. He stopped at the foot of the stoop and stood there looking up at us, grinning nastily.

"You're alive," he said.

"That's suppose to be funny?" Petey said.

"Don't get smart with me, bitch, or I might —"

"Here, Uncle, have a look," I broke in, flipping the envelope with the 8 x 10's at him.

He took out the prints and spent a lot of time studying them. When he looked at us again, his face was not a good thing to see.

"We figure they're worth two bills a week," Petey said wisely.

"I'll show you what they're worth," he said softly. Slowly, he ripped the prints into small pieces.

"You forget," Petey said. "We've got the negatives."

"So?"

"So we send prints to the head man and what you got? The head man peels that blue coat off your fat gut. You got nothing. No more Mr. Big with the stick, no more payoff from the cats. Understand?"

Harry Wedge didn't say anything.

"Course if we don't send prints to the head man," Petey continued, "then you got it same as now. See, man? You keep right on collecting. The only difference is you turn over two bills to us — say every Monday morning."

"I don't like it."

I slid a glance at Petey. Her jaw was shoved forward, and her face was tight. "You gotta like it, man," she said.

"Until I get them negatives," he said. "Or until you're dead."

"We ain't gonna be dead, cop. Those negatives are in the right place. Something happens to us and they go to the head man. Got it?"

"I don't see it that way," he said.

"Yeah? How do you see it?"

"You figure that out, bitch."

He turned and walked away from us. I watched him go down the street, slow and easy. He didn't act like he was worried one damn little bit.

"Okay," I said to Petey. "Now what we got?"

"He's scared," she said.

"He didn't act scared."

"It's in his eyes," she said.

"So you figure we got two hundred fish coming every Monday?"

"He'll break it down to one. But he'll pay."

"I don't like it," I said. "This Wedge —"

She sat there looking at me. Then she said. "Let's go down to

Hood's. Before you get an ulcer."

We walked down the stoop and turned toward Hood's corner drug.

"A hundred every seven days," Petey said softly.

I looked at her out of the corner of my eye. She was thinking hard.

"We can do plenty with that, Click."

"Sure," I said, walking the curb.

"It'll buy plenty of wine."

"Sure."

"Nice clothes."

"Yeah."

"Plenty of—"

"Jeez!" I interrupted. "Look at this!"

I stared up Forty-sixth. Three rods were coming at us, side by side, and they were coming fast, the sun glistening off their shiny grills. One was scraping the curb.

"Drag race," Petey said.

"Man, them boys are tally—"

"A bill," Petey said. "Maybe two. I can do a lot with that."

Something was wrong with her voice. I whirled around. Her eyes were round and bright. She looked peculiar.

The roar of the rods was loud now. "We, Petey, w—"

Her hands didn't move much. Just enough to reach my belly and tip me off balance. I felt myself stepping back into the street. I tried to twist, to jump out of the way.

I couldn't move a muscle.

It smashed hard against me. I wanted to tell Petey, No! but the blood in my eyes, the roar in my ears, the blackness shutting out everything, the numbness speeding over my body was too much.



Malicious Monikers

In Ironton, O., Patrolmen Robert M. Griffith is embarrassed every time he arrests a man who has the habit of coming to Ironton from Flatswood, Ky. and getting drunk and disorderly. The man's name is Robert M. Griffith. And in Kalamazoo, Mich., a motorist from nearby Plainwell pleaded guilty in city court of driving under the influence of intoxicants. His name was Tom Collins.

Man's Best Friend

A bandit in Grand Junction, Colo. robbed Gerald Wert, a liquor store clerk, of \$340. After taking the money, the bandit made Wert lie down on the floor beside the store's watchdog, who was sound asleep.

And in Ogden, Utah, Alvin Stauffer returned home to find that a burglar had taken some clothing and money from a piggy bank. Puzzled, as to why the intruder had met no opposition from the family dog, Stauffer discovered the burglar apparently had taken the dog, too.



AFTER she had let him in, she had gone into the cool, tastefully furnished parlor, flicked on the radio, let it play a few minutes, and then turned it off in annoyance. Almost four long hours remained until her dinner date with Roger. She walked over to the window to stare down at the sun-drenched street and watch the cars bumble past five stories below. Tired of that, she lighted one of her gold-tipped cigarettes, took a

Joe came to fix the drainpipe. When Miss Marlowe invited him to have a drink, he accepted. Who wouldn't?

Four Hours to Kill

BY F. J. SMITH

few impatient puffs, and squashed it out, conscious all the while of the sounds coming from the bathroom.

It was then that it occurred to her that it might make an interesting and droll diversion that could help while away the time.

She walked along the little hallway to the pink-tiled bathroom with its frosted glass shower enclosure, and stood, framed in the doorway, staring down objectively at his broad back and thick, bulging neck. She had moved so quietly that he hadn't heard her, and was, therefore, unconscious of her nearness. With mild curiosity, she watched him adjust a length of chrome-plated pipe into place, puffing and grunting with the effort.

His name was Joe Martinetti and he was superintendant of the thirty-family apartment building. He lived somewheres in the basement, like a mole, she guessed.

She had seen him a number of times, sweeping the outer steps, mopping the hallways, fussing in the lobby. Occasionally, she had nodded to him, noting his intense, dark eyes that betrayed, as many eyes did, a secret admiration for her.

Now, she found herself wondering about the man. He was about forty-five and, from all appearances, not very intelligent. Was he a bachelor? Did he have any female friends? Hardly. Judging from his appearance, it seemed un-

believable that any woman could ever condescend to be intimate with him.

"How are you making out, Joe?"

His large, squarish head bobbed around, startled at the sound of her voice. Then he smiled, uneasily.

"It's almost finished now, Miss Marlowe," he informed her. "I'm puttin' it back together again."

"Oh." She leaned back against the door, her low-cut blouse and tight blue skirt molding the soft curves of her body. "What was the matter?"

"There was hairs in the drain. I guess maybe you been shampooin' your hair in this sink." He jabbed a thick finger towards a fragment of newspaper upon which lay a clump of long, blonde hair. "See what I mean?"

She shrugged indifferently and her full, sulking lips curved into a faintly derisive smile. "A girl has to wash her hair some place, hasn't she, Joe?"

"Well, sure, Miss Marlowe." He wrinkled his forehead. "Seems to me they'd oughta make provisions for somethin' like that. Maybe put some kind of a little strainer in these sinks. You know what I mean? Maybe a little piece of wire screen. I'm always havin' trouble."

"That sounds like a practical idea," she said. "Why don't you try inventing something like that? You might make a lot of money."

He seemed pleased at the suggestion. He opened his mouth, as

though to make some further comment, and then, deciding against it, he removed a Stilson wrench from a crude wooden tool box and began tightening the joints.

"You didn't mind my having to call you, did you, Joe?" she went on in a tantalizing voice. "It's so dreadfully difficult for a girl all alone. When anything goes wrong—" she lifted her shoulders helplessly—"I'm simply lost."

"No, I don't mind," he said, turning to look up at her gravely. "Any time you need me, you just don't hesitate to pick up that phone and hollar. I—I kinda like to help you."

Her thin, sleek eyebrows moved in surprise at the odd, wistful note in his voice.

"You're sure?"

"You bet," he insisted. "You have my word, any time you call, day or night, old Joe'll come on the double. Yes, sir. It's a pleasure."

He gave the connection one last smart tug and tossed the wrench into the tool box. He rolled the bundle of hair into the newspaper and dropped the crumpled ball in beside the tools. Then he raised himself and stood facing her, shifting his tool box uneasily.

"Well," he grunted, "that oughta be all right now."

"Goodness, Joe," she said in a honeyed voice, "I must say, you're certainly a fast worker."

He grinned with professional pride, while his dark eyes moved

furtively to take in her body, sweeping it from the tips of her tiny sandal-encased feet to the top of her glossy blonde head.

"You gotta know your stuff to hold down a job like this," he said importantly. "A fella's gotta keep on his toes every second."

"I can imagine," she agreed, wide-eyed. "It must take a terrible lot of experience. It seems impossible that only one man can keep up a large building like this all by himself."

"It ain't easy," said Joe. "Course, some times she gets a little slow. You take like today, for instance. I got a chance to take a little nap. After all, a fella deserves a little nap once in a while. I was down there in my room, all stretched out, nice and easy, when the phone rung."

"You mean when I called you."

"Sure."

She pursed up her lips, like a small, sulking child. "I'm sorry, Joe. I had no idea you were resting. Why, I wouldn't have dreamed of bothering you."

"That ain't nothing. I don't mind *you* botherin' me."

"That's sweet," she said, suppressing a laugh.

Joe shifted his tool box again. "Well, guess maybe I better be on my way."

The game was too amusing. She didn't want it to stop just yet. She said: "Joe, I know I'm a nuisance. But while you're here, I wonder if

you'd look at the kitchen sink. The water seems to be running down too slowly. Do you think it might be stopped up, too?"

While Joe ran water into the sink and thoughtfully checked its rate of flow, she pattered over to a cabinet removed a bottle of Scotch. She poured out a stiff double shot into a crystal tumbler, secretly watching him through the corner of her eye.

A monster of a man, she thought. Not tall, but long-armed and short-legged with a barrel chest and massive shoulders. He reminded her of a gorilla she had once seen in the zoo. He wasn't, she decided, much more intelligent than the gorilla.

She wondered what his reaction to the liquor would be. Surely it would be interesting to find out. Good for a laugh or two. She could tell Roger about it, and it would give them something to talk about tonight.

"Nothing wrong with that sink," he pronounced.

"Oh?" she said, walking over to him, holding the glass in long, slender fingers tipped with bright crimson. "Well, that's good." She held out the glass. "Here, Joe. Would you care for a drink?"

He looked doubtful a moment, and she added: "It's very good Scotch. You deserve it. You've worked hard."

Hesitantly, he took the drink, raised it to thick lips, and downed

the whiskey without pausing.

"God," he muttered, moving his head for emphasis. "God A'mighty, that was good. Ain't often a fella like me gets a chance to taste some-thing' that good." He held out the glass and examined it thoughtfully. "That's the real stuff, ain't it, Miss Marlowe?"

"That's the real stuff," she assured him, smiling a little.

"Like you, Miss Marlowe. Know what I mean. Class."

She was pleased. "Would you care for another?"

"Well —"

"Of course you would," she said, taking his glass. "You've earned it."

Leaning casually against the formica-topped work counter, she watched him finish the second drink, curiously fascinated at his hulking strength, his crudeness, his child-like simplicity. Man in his most primitive form, she thought. What a shocking contrast to the suave, polished men of her world.

She felt like a scientist studying a rare specimen. It was, in a way, educational, interesting, a little exciting. She must take note of everything about him, so she could tell Roger later. "You should have seen him after the second drink," she could hear herself saying.

"Tell me, Joe," she said quite frankly. "You're not married, are you?"

"No sir!"

"What in the world do you do

with all your spare time? I mean evenings, and your day off."

Drawing the back of a soiled denim sleeve across moist lips, he looked at her a little hazily. The liquor seemed to be taking hold already.

"There ain't nothin' much to do," he admitted a little bitterly. "About all a fella like me does, is work. Work like a goddam mule all the time. If it ain't one thing, it's another. Seldom a fella gets a chance to catch his goddam breath around this place. Say, like I wanna take a little nap once in a while. Right away some of these hoity-toity slobs is callin' me. Joe, do this. Joe, do that. This is broken. That's broken."

"You mean me, don't you?" she said, raising hurt, baby blue eyes.

"No, you're all right. I—I like you. You know somethin' else? You're the best lookin' woman ever stepped inside this crummy buildin'. And a lady."

"Do you really mean that?" she said, smiling provocatively, thrusting her shoulders back so her full, ripe breasts strained against the light fabric of her blouse.

He looked at her a moment, working his tongue across his lips. "You're damn right I do! You got 'em all beat by a mile." He sucked in his lower lip, ran palms across the sides of his denim work jacket. "Joe knows the real McCoy when he sees it. The first time I ever seen you I says to myself, 'There's the

real McCoy.' Ever' time I'm out there moppin' them halls and sweepin' them sidewalks, I say to myself, 'There goes a real woman. A woman with class!'" He paused and winked slyly. "Don't think I don't see you more times than you think I do."

"Oh," she said, a little surprised at his frank admission.

"You bet I do. Sometimes when I'm in my room down there in the basement, I can see you from the window. The window looks on the street. You didn't know that, did you?" He was beginning to warm up to the subject. "Don't think I don't see you leave with them Jim Dandies. And don't think I don't see you come home, too. Sometimes I sit up waitin' for you to come home, figgerin' somethin' might of happened to you; that maybe you got hurt or somethin', carousin' around in them big, fancy cars."

"Heavens, Joe," she said. "I didn't know you kept track of my movements."

Joe smiled wistfully. "I been kinda keepin' my eye on you ever since you moved into this place. I like you, Miss Marlowe. A man—I mean one like me, he can't help liking a woman, whether it does him any good or not."

"Well, *that* is something."

Joe's blunt fingers worked in his palms like hard claws. He had some difficulty getting the words out, but finally said:

"I figgered maybe if I set back and took it nice and easy, you'd give me a tumble. Let me take you out. Just once maybe."

She had a fleeting vision of herself walking along Canal Street, her arm locked in Joe's.

"Oh, Joe," she said, emitting a husky laugh, "I couldn't do that. I think you'd better leave, now. I have to get dressed."

"Goin' out with one of them Jim Dandies?"

Although she tried, she couldn't hold back a laugh.

Joe's face darkened perceptibly and his full lower lip shot out in a gesture of truculence. "I'm not good enough for you."

"Did I say that?" she said, at once a little frightened at the sudden aggressive change in his manner. "You'd better go, now, Joe. I do have to dress."

"You figger I'm not good enough for you, Miss Marlowe."

"Joe, you'd better go." The game was getting out of hand.

"Ain't that what you figger?" he insisted.

"No... But..."

She drew back impulsively as he took a step toward her. She showed no panic. She'd been with enough men—hundreds of men, all kinds, on the way up, to be worried about one more. But she realized she must get away from him without hurting him. He was drunk and he had all the earmarks of being dangerous. But he was standing

between her and the door, blocking her path. She didn't dare scream. There was no telling what he might do. At the least, he'd never forgive her. And she had to live here. This was her address; the phone number was properly listed.

She must be calm. She must use her head. Though she had never coped with exactly his likes before, under similar conditions, she knew that hysteria would get her nothing.

"Joe," she said, "would you care for another drink? Isn't it good stuff? Drink all you want. I have another whole bottle." A plan was beginning to form in her mind.

"You're damn tootin' I want another drink. You have one with me this time?"

"Of course. Pour us a couple."

"You pour 'em."

"Don't be foolish," she said seriously. "You and I are going to have a time for ourselves. Now be a good boy and pour us a couple of stiff drinks. I want to get feeling good, too. A girl has to get feeling good if she wants to—get in the mood."

He extended a hand to touch her, and she shrank back.

"See what I mean?" he grumbled, taking a quick step forward and catching hold of her arm. His fingers dug painfully into her flesh.

"Joe, let me go," she whimpered. "You're hurting."

The strength in his one hand astounded her as he led her over to

the formica work-counter where the bottle stood. He let her go. He waited. She could smell him, smell the sweat. She could *feel* him. She poured and took it neat. She needed it. Joe treated himself to a few generous swallows. He dabbed at a small trickle that had started to work its way along his chin.

Now, his arms closed about her in a clumsy embrace, almost squeezing the breath out of her, forcing her body tightly against his. "I love your blonde hair," he said. "It smells nice. Like you. You smell nice. Lady nice." She struggled to free herself. Then she stopped struggling.

She didn't know whether it was the whiskey or not doing it to her, but she did know his strength. It ran through her, making her shudder. But the sweat smell was there, strong, revolting. If only he didn't smell so of sweat, and looking like such a gorilla it might be fun, an exciting change from all the others . . .

Are you crazy? she asked herself at what she had begun thinking.

To trick him she must play on his sympathy. She must in some way try to pacify him, to hold him back, while she got into the bedroom and locked it. Yes, that was the best way. Let him be sore.

"Joe," she said, softly. "I've been teasing you. Testing you. Now—I'm going to make you happy."

His grip relaxed a little and he

gave her a sort of dumbfounded stare.

"I know how to do it," she went on. "I can teach you things. Nice things. First," she ended, lowering her voice to a provocative whisper, "I'll have to take off my clothes. Would you like that? Would you like me to take off all my clothes?"

He swallowed hard, still looking at her stupidly and she shrugged free of his grasp. It's the whiskey mostly, she told herself; he wouldn't be so brazen without it. He'll be all right when it's out of him.

With tantalizing slowness, she began working at the buttons of her blouse, smiling all the while, lowering her long, mascaraed lashes demurely. Then, after she had pulled back the blouse to reveal the full white hammocks of her brassiere, she stopped.

"Joe," she said with an effort at naivete, "don't look until I'm finished."

"Huh? Why?"

"Well, I want to surprise you. It's—it's nicer that way. Now, be a good boy and turn your head."

As soon as his back was turned, she moved quickly and as silently as her sandals would permit toward the room. There was a telephone in there and—

She heard him and knew she'd never make it. She wheeled around. Her eyes searched frantically about for some appropriate weapon as he approached. But there was nothing.

"Now I'm taking off my brassiere." She began doing so. I'll be—be ready in a minute, Joe." She went into the bedroom. He went with her.

"You was runnin'," he stated, and both his hands had her arms now. "You was tryin' to make a fool outa Joe." His face was red with anger, whiskey-inflamed. She could hear his heavy breathing, kind of a rasping, bovine sound. Then he grinned. "Joe's waitin'. Take it off, like you said."

She stood there, panting, looking at him.

He grinned again. "Now those," he commanded.

What the hell, she thought, I have no choice. It's my own damn fault. She reached behind her, un-snapped the brassiere.

She saw the wild eagerness in his eyes. It kindled her and the thought ran through her, again:

How will it be? The hard hands, the . . . "All right, Joe," she said softly. "All right . . ."

She dropped her skirt to the floor, stepped out of it.

"I'm wise to *you*."

His voice chilled her.

"Joe's a fool. A goddam fool! Can't put two and two together." He was raging at himself. "Lady! Class! All them Jim Dandies comin' and goin'. Now I see . . ."

She was smiling provocatively when his fist smashed into her face, sent her reeling onto the bed. Then his hands were about her throat. She tried to scream, but only a faint, gurgling sound broke from her throat as his fingers drew tighter and tighter in wild unreasoning anger.

"Prostitoot, no-good prostitoot."

She heard the words over and over, until they faded with her life.



One Of Those Nights

Deputy Sheriff Bert Lacey in Springfield, Ill. had trouble one night when he attempted to serve a summons for jury duty. He knocked at one house and a suspicious woman refused to open the door and called police. When the officers arrived, Lacey established his identity and the women explained that she thought the deputy was a prowler.

Lacey then tried to serve the summons on the woman's husband. The woman told Lacey her husband had been dead more than a year.

Turnabout

In Champaign, Ill., Thomas A. Hagan, Jr. was fined \$3 in city court for a parking violation. Hagan then reached in his pocket and handed over a \$3 ticket he had bought for the policemen's ball and demanded a refund.

Three's a Crowd

BY
JOE
GRENZEBACK

*Nita wanted Pete not to be a brother any longer.
And she wanted Sammy off her back...*



I got a beer out of the icebox and took it into the living room, and Nita was still standing there glaring at the wall. Some other time it might have been cute.

"Knock it off," I told her. "I brought you a beer."

"You would," she said. She turned around and showed me her teeth. "I could be dying someday, you'll go out and get me a beer! Is that the best you can do?"

"Shut up," I said.

"Why should I? Does he put his big paws all over you? Hell, no! I'm the one takes the beating, so what do you care?"

"Plenty," I said. "But it takes time. You think I like this setup?"

"Then why don't you do something?"

"Christ! Gimme time, will you?" I went over to the easy chair and sat down. I had a bad taste in my mouth, and all the beer did was make it worse. In a few minutes, Nita came over and squatted down by the arm of the chair.

"Pete. . . ." She said it soft, and I could smell the perfume in her hair. It was a different angle, but she hadn't quit by a long shot. She said, "Pete, look at me."

"Sure."

"You want me, don't you?"

I grinned at her. "You got it wrong, honey. I already got you."

"With Sammy around?"

"With or without," I said. "Sammy don't count."

"Then why don't you tell him?"

"Tell him?"

"Just tell him," she said. "Tell him to lay off me."

I had to laugh. "Sure, why not? And if he wants to know why, I tell him the rest of it—like you're not my sister after all, and all you wanted was a little help getting me out of stir. Only now I'm out, so we don't need him so much!"

"Well?"

"Why not?" I said. "I tell him how bad he's been took, and then

we all sit down and have a drink!" I reached a cigarette off the end table and put it in my mouth. "You're out of your mind," I told her.

"I will be." She watched while I lit the cigarette, and then she got up and stalked away towards the bedroom. At the doorway, she stopped and looked back at me. "The trouble with you," she said evenly, "you're scared."

"Of Sammy? You're damn right." I squinted a little, watching her through the smoke. "You know how much he weighs?"

"Better than you do," she said. She went on into the bedroom and slammed the door. I sat there with the cigarette, and I could remember the first time I heard about Sammy—the way she had told me on visitor's day up at the farm:

I got this guy, Pete. He's going to help us.

Yeah?

He thinks you're my brother.

She laughed about it then. You need a guy bad, you get him the best way you can—and with Sammy, the best way was Nita. It worked fine. Only now I was out three months, and it wasn't so funny any more. We still had him.

Like cancer, I thought. And I knew Nita was right about why didn't I do something.

Only what? You don't get brave with a lump like Sammy. Whatever I did, it had to be sure. A setup. It had to be like the Fletcher place.

And that was something else. It wasn't enough he had my girl. I lined up a touch like I had tonight, and Sammy cut himself in—always the good ones, always the jobs that were rich and easy. This Fletcher was both. He lived alone with a tin-can wall safe, and Thursday nights he went to the movies—always the Bijou, always the same time. He was regular as a clock.

I got out the sketch I'd made of the house and spread it flat across my knees. In the margin, I had the schedule of Fletcher's movements, the three weeks I'd tagged him. You knew about Fletcher—where he went, where he would be, how long it took him to go and come. And Sammy, too. An easy job like this, Sammy had to be there.

A setup, I thought.

A kind of excitement fluttered in my chest. I stared at the sketch, and I saw the stairway, the front door, the way the house was laid out. I got a big picture in my head. I thought it through, and it was damn near perfect. Sammy and Fletcher! . . .

"What's wrong with you?"

I looked up, and Nita was standing in the bedroom doorway. She had on a blue wrapper, a silk thing, belted in to show her figure. She came over and frowned at the sketch in my lap. "When's he coming?" she said.

I grinned. "In about an hour."

A little shudder moved her shoul-

ders. Keep him off my back. You tell him I'm sick," she said grimly. "I'm in bed. You let him in the bedroom, I'll spit in his face."

"Would your brother's face be safe?" I felt good. I had it figured now.

Here eyes lit up. "Meaning?"

She knew what I meant, of course.

"That's different." She laughed. "*We're related.*"

I kissed her, the way I know she likes to be kissed, and the way I like to kiss her. I went in with her, took off her silk wrapper. "Okay, brother," she said huskily. "Okay, take it easy . . ."

"I'll teach you who's your—"

"Teach me," she breathed into my ear.

I did.

I stayed with her awhile afterward. We smoked a cigarette, together, the way we always do, passing it back and forth.

"Sammy." I said. "Sammy gets five or ten years. By the time he gets out, he won't even know us."

She turned, her softness brushing me, and gave me a look like she thought I was nuts. Then it got through, and a kind of wonder widened her eyes. "A frame?"

"It's better than murder," I said. "It does the trick, and nobody's hurt. No risk, even. If it works, he thinks it's a bad break."

"That good?"

I told her. It didn't take long, because it was simple. Real simple.

All it needed was Fletcher. "It's in the timing," I said. "You call the Bijou at ten o'clock. You say Fletcher is wanted at home and will they page him. That's all you do."

"So what if he's not there?"

"He will be," I said. "Old Dependable."

She smiled and nestled back into my arms, sliding her arms around my neck.

She kissed me hard, rubbing against me. It went on for a long time, and I guess we both felt the same way. We were kissing Sammy goodbye.

I was dressed and waiting when the doorbell rang. I went out to the little entry hall. I opened the door, and Sammy was leaning on the bell.

He went past me into the living room, bouncing a little, walking on the balls of his feet. He was six-one, maybe two-twenty pounds. I could see his shoulders bulging the coat, and you had a feeling of hard muscles and meanness. It gave me the creeps.

"Where's Nita?" he said.

"In bed."

A quick grin flashed in his face, and he ran a big hand across his chin. "Ready and waiting," he said. "That's some broad."

"She's sick. I think she's asleep."

"Yeah?" He cocked a bushy eyebrow and looked at the bedroom door, making up his mind. "What's wrong with her?"

"She's a woman," I said.

"Christ!"

I smiled a little. "It don't matter tonight. You won't have time."

"I always got time." He sat down on the couch, and the springs made a noise like a dying cat. "Get me a beer," he growled. "What the hell."

I got him the beer, and all the time I kept thinking how big he was, quick on his feet, and I wondered how it was going to be. I thought about Fletcher and how it had to work, and I tried to think where I'd made a mistake. I decided I hadn't.

Sammy said, "What's wrong with you?"

"Me?"

"You got the jumps," he said. "You look like a man on a green apple diet, ever since I come in here." He finished the beer and set the bottle on the floor. "We got a problem?"

I shook my head. "It's nerves. It's the way I get sometimes."

"Nuts." He frowned a little and looked at the sketch where I'd left it on the floor. "So what we got?" he said. "How good?"

"Cash, I guess. Maybe a lot."

"He keeps it in the house?"

"In a safe. He don't think much of banks." I got the clipping out of my pocket and gave it to him. "It was in the paper."

He studied the clipping, squinting his eyes. "Jewelry? It says here he collects jewelry. What about that?"

"Sure," I said. "If it's in the safe."

Sammy grinned. "J Martin Fletcher," he read. "J for Jerk. You think we can trust him?"

"Like a clock," I said. I almost laughed in his face.

I showed him the layout on the sketch, the burglar alarm, the safe, the way we'd go in. The servants worked by the day, and the house would be empty. When I finished, he leaned back and grinned at me. "You got a touch," he said. "You got a touch, and you got a sister. I never had it so good."

"Sure."

He looked at the bedroom door. "You think she's awake now?"

"She took a pill," I said. "You got a car?"

"Outside."

"Then let's get started."

"Now?"

"It's a long way," I said. "It's better we don't drive fast."

He frowned a little and heaved himself up from the couch. He looked again at the bedroom door, and he wet his fat lips. I thought he was going to drool. "She's maybe awake," he decided.

"I told you. She took a pill."

"Christ."

I turned out the light, and we went outside to the car. Sammy got in behind the wheel. He sat there a minute, staring back towards the apartment, and then he grunted and kicked at the starter.

"So what's wrong?"

"That Nita," he said. "I been

thinking about it a lot lately."

"About what?"

"The last couple of times. She's tired, you know? She acts kind of funny." He gave me a look off the side of his face. "She's really sick, huh?"

"Why not?"

"Women get cute," he said. "I wouldn't want she got cute with me. You know what I mean?"

"You got it wrong," I said.

"Maybe." He swung the car away from the curb, and we drove east, easing along with the flow of traffic. After a minute, he said, "I might be pretty sore if I thought she was stalling me, after what I did for you."

"Why should she?"

He shrugged, watching the road. "Sleeping beauty," he grumbled. "We get back, I think I'll wake her up."

I got the cigarettes out of my pocket. I tried to shake one loose, and the whole damn pack jumped out of my hand.

Sammy made an ugly grin. "You still got the jumps?"

"Not me." I got a cigarette into my mouth and put the rest back into my pocket. I tried to smile. "It's a setup," I said. Because it had to be. I didn't like it that Sammy was thinking.

I watched the road, and I figured my play: how it would work when Fletcher showed up, and how I could clear so that Sammy was left. I went over it maybe a dozen times.

If Fletcher showed and my timing was right, I couldn't miss.

The house was on a corner, a big two-story job with lots of lawn and a flagstone terrace along the side. There was a single streetlight, dim, barely lighting the edge of lawn. The rest was darkness. We parked on the sidestreet, just down from the back of the lot.

Sammy twisted around, bunching down in the seat to look out the window. "Big," he said. "All that for one guy?"

"Two guys," I said. "Us."

He laughed softly down in his chest. "Let's go."

We went in off the terrace, and it was easy. Too easy. We got to the safe, and it wasn't even ten o'clock.

I fiddled with the dial, stalling, keeping an eye on my watch. After a while, Sammy said, "What's wrong?"

"Nothing," I said. "It works stiff."

"You losing your touch?"

"Just hold the light," I told him.

I could feel him bulking behind me, shifting his weight as the minutes dragged on. It made me nervous. I gave it as long as I could, and then I opened the little steel door.

Sammy grunted.

"Gimme the light," I said. I shoved it into the safe, and there were papers and ledgers and a neat double stack of packaged bills. At the back, there were maybe a dozen

jeweler's cases, different sizes. I snapped off the light and handed it back to him.

"What we got?" said Sammy.

"Papers and cash."

"No jewelry?"

"Not in here," I lied.

He swore softly. "You think it's in the house?"

"It's got to be somewhere."

"Yeah," I saw the dim flash of his teeth, and a note of eagerness got into his voice. "How much time we got?"

"Time," I said. He moved his head, peering off into the shadows, trying to figure a place to look. I wanted to laugh. This part was going to be easier than I'd thought. "Maybe upstairs," I said. "Maybe he keeps it in his bedroom."

"Why not?" He flashed the light towards the doorway across the room. "Let's give it a look."

"I'll finish here," I said. "It don't need both of us."

"I won't be long," he said. "Keep an eye out."

I waited until I could hear him moving on the floor above. I got the cash out of the safe and took it outside to the car. When I got back to the house, it was 10:15.

The safe was wide open the way I left it. I reached in for the ledgers and some of the papers, and I spread them around on the floor so you couldn't miss that something was wrong. Then I went to the front window and waited for Fletcher to come home.

It had to work.

I watched the street, listening to the faint sounds above that said Sammy was looking. The street outside was empty and dark, and I wondered how long Sammy would search; how long it would take for Fletcher to show. The way it figured, he was due to show up by 10:20. I looked at my watch, and it was 10:22.

Two minutes late.

I got a cigarette out of my pocket. A big silence boomed in my ears, and the cigarette snapped between my fingers. I threw it away and listened to the stillness, turning my head to watch the stairs. It seemed a long time before I heard him again, the sound of searching. I tried to relax.

Then it was 10:26, and I got to thinking what might have gone wrong: they couldn't find Fletcher at the Bijou, he couldn't find a cab. Or maybe Nita forgot to phone.

Nita forget? Don't make me laugh!

Only I couldn't even smile. I felt a dampness under my clothes, a cold sweat crawling across my back. What if she had?

But that was wrong. It had to be wrong.

Give it a minute, I thought. Just one more minute.

And then I saw the cab. It came slow along the curb, ready to stop, and I didn't have to guess who was inside. J. Martin Fletcher was almost home. Old Dependable.

I stopped sweating, and the eagerness came back again. I eased away from the window, watching till he started up the walk. It was all up to me, now. It was all in the timing. I gave it ten seconds, and then I went to the foot of the stairs. "Sammy!"

He said something I couldn't make out, muffled, somewhere above. I heard him moving towards the stairs.

"Hurry!" I said.

I went over to the door that led to the terrace room. I stopped in the doorway, reaching back to the lightswitch that was there on the wall. I heard Fletcher's key in the front door, and the sound of Sammy hitting the stairs. He came down two at a time, and then he stopped. The front door was open, and Fletcher made a black silhouette against the grey darkness outside.

Sammy said, "That you?"

I hit the lightswitch and ran.

I had the car moving before Sammy reached it. He piled in beside me, breathing hard, and we made a fast ten blocks. I turned into the highway, easing it down to the pace of other cars, and Sammy just sat there, staring hard at the windshield. "Some lookout," he said. "Christ!"

"He came from the side," I said. "I only got two eyes."

He grunted, half turning in the seat. I could feel his eyes on the side of my face. "You got the stuff?"

I nodded. "You?"

"Nothing." He swore softly. "He's got any jewelry, he must keep it buried somewhere!"

"So now what?"

He took a big breath and let it out slowly. "Vacation," he said. "The old bastard saw me."

"Us," I lied. "He must have seen both of us."

"That makes it better?"

"We ought to go some place. Some other town, maybe."

"That's what I said." He let it lay there, and then he said, "I should've busted his head. He turned on that light, I couldn't even think. Christ!" He frowned a little and thumped his fist against his knee. "What made him come back so soon?"

My hands tightened a little on the steering wheel. I gave him a look, but he was staring straight ahead like the answer was sitting outside on the hood. I said, "Maybe a lousy movie."

"Lousy is right!"

"Look, I'll take you to your place."

"Now?"

"You got to pack, don't you? We'll pick you up first thing tomorrow."

"Who's we?"

"Me and Nita," I said. "We'll take a trip."

He was quiet a minute. Then he looked at me, and a half grin twisted his mouth. "This trip," he said slowly, "we ought to split up.

You go one way, I go another. Nita goes with me."

"Sure."

He wet his lips, and the grin got wider. "You think she'll like that?"

"She'll love it," I said. "Wait'll I tell her."

We split the bills at Sammy's place, and it was a bad surprise. There were ten bundles, fives and tens and even some ones. The whole thing wasn't much over twelve hundred bucks.

"I thought this guy was loaded," Sammy said. He looked at the money spread out on the bed, and he spit. "He don't like banks," he said, "so where's the rest of it?"

"Should I know?"

He sat down. "You sure you got it all?"

"That's it," I told him.

He made a face. "Buried, maybe. Money and jewels all over the place. He puts it in coffee cans and plants it in the garden! You picked a swell job," he said. "Christ!"

"Is it my fault?"

A hard grin stiffened his mouth. "I'd hate to think so," he said. "I'd break your back."

It was a joke, only nobody laughed. I could feel a dryness back in my throat, and a kind of soreness worked in my legs. It was time to get out. I went over to the bed and stuffed my half of the money into my pockets.

Sammy said, "Okay. You pick me up. We'll drive out of this town together before we split up."

"Six o'clock?"

"Five." He got out of the chair and stood there, scowling down at his hands. "That's Fletcher," he growled. "I should've busted him!"

"Yeah." I opened the door.

"What a stinkin' deal!" he said.

He didn't know the half of it.

Outside, I got in the car and drove a couple of blocks to a phone booth. Sammy wouldn't name me, because I tied him to too many things. Just the same, he might get bail, so we ought to slip town for a while. I called Nita, and then I tipped the cops. It was almost over.

I left the car where it was and took a cab back to the apartment. It was all up to Fletcher, now. J. Martin Fletcher, Old Dependable.

I had it made.

The rest of the night was a celebration. Just Nita and me and a bottle of bourbon. It was Christmas and New Year's all in one.

And then I was waking up, and the clock on the dresser said ten after eight. I rolled over. The room was empty, shaded and dim with the blinds down, and I wondered where Nita was.

I got out of bed and pulled on my shorts, and I heard a soft something outside the bedroom door.

"Nita?"

She didn't answer, and it made me nervous. I went over and jerked the door open.

"Me," said Sammy. "Nita went out."

I felt like I'd swallowed a chunk

of ice. My jaw went slack, and I couldn't move.

"She left you a note," he said. "She went for some tickets. You going somewhere?" He just stood there, half-smiling, watching me die. He looked about nine feet tall.

"You—you weren't there," I said. "We came by this morning, you weren't there."

"They picked me up, Pete. I figure they got a tip." He moved forward, big and ugly, forcing me back into the bedroom.

"Fletcher," I said. The fear got into my throat, and I almost choked. "Mug book, you know?"

He cocked his head. "They had him down there. He said it wasn't me."

"What?!" I stopped where I was, staring at him, trying to find the sense of it. "He saw you!" I blurted.

Sammy shrugged. "I heard about something," he said. "Jewelry. Somebody took fifty grand worth of jewelry." His hand snapped out and caught my wrist. "I don't like you should stall me, Pete. You or Nita, either way. You want to tell me where it is?"

I couldn't even talk.

"Jewelry, Pete!" He slapped me hard, and a red ball burst in my head, sending out sparks.

"In the safe," I gasped. "I never touched it!"

"That's what you say!"

He slapped me again, and it knocked me halfway across the room. I scrambled up, but there

was no place to go.

Fletcher, I thought. Old Dependable!

And I saw how it was—the only way it could be. Sammy's been wrong about buried cans in the garden. Twelve hundred bucks was all Fletcher had. And the jewelry.

I started to laugh. But I looked at Sammy and saw there was no

laughter in it, for me.

No wonder he didn't identify Sammy. The old bastard was trying to defraud the insurance company!

And me, I'd fixed it.

Just the two of us, I thought. Only it wasn't me and Nita. It was me and Sammy.

Sammy's fist spun me around. Then he was at me.



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MANY things are useful in police work, which is unexciting except in memory; and of these many things, memory is the most useful of all. Outside my office now is a man named Rossiter, and

shortly I shall begin to question him, and it will not take very long. In time, from upstairs, there will come a specially-typed commendation, done in quadruplicate in the sure tradition of the Chicago Police Department, to hail the shining brilliance of my detective work in the case of the suspect Rossiter. But meanwhile at my home my supper



Tom
S'Ellie

Manila

Mission

A Booklengther

*A death notice nailed to the door, a chauffeur
is shot, two American officers disappear.
Just an average, tranquil evening . . .*

BY CHARLES EINSTEIN

goes untasted, and outside my window it is raining black rain, raining for the third consecutive day, flooding the underpasses and swelling the gutters. I have only to close my eyes to see again the shell holes, filled with rain, in the streets of Manila.

Will Beatty, the Australian, drove the jeep with a cautious unconcern, if that is a fair thing to say, and this I remember best because then, too, just as now, it had rained for three days. The CI lab was a building by itself, once a cell block that the Japanese used for prisoners when they had the city. We got into the jeep and drove out the main entrance, flanked by the jutting turrets that looked like movie kiosks with an American flag to either side. The signs at the entrance said BUREAU of PRISONS; and, nearly blocking out that sign, PROVOST MARSHAL—CITY OF MANILA; and POLICE DEPT.—CITY OF MANILA; and SHOW ALL PASSES; and SLOW 5 MPH. Outside the gate, in the darkness, the water from the first puddle splattered and slashed angrily upward as Beatty turned the steering wheel. There was no rain now, but the night hung wet in the beams of headlights.

"What happens," Beatty said, "if we drive through a puddle and it isn't just a puddle? What if it's a hole, mate? A sweet deep hole. Shell hole."

I said, "We fall in, that's all."

"And stay there?"

"And stay there."

"I thought jeeps could do anything."

"Anything includes falling into shell holes."

Beatty nodded. There were no street lights at all. The curious concentration with which he drove was the more remarkable because his face seemed to work independently, on a quiet mission of its own, that of smoking a pipe. Will was the most perfect pipe smoker I ever knew. He had the build for it, and the face, too, with square, hard jaw and an even mustache.

I said, "Where to, driver?"

"Quezon City. It's outside the city limits."

"How can you tell?"

"A friend of mine let me have a map."

"Quezon City big place?"

"Big place."

"How do we find what we find?"

Will Beatty shrugged. "They said a cemetery. The only one. We couldn't miss it."

"Come on."

"The dead bloke's in a cemetery."

"Good place."

"Fellow named Paterno going to meet us. Outside the Red Cross canteen."

"Nifty. Who's Paterno?"

"A friend of the police."

"Everybody in Manila's a friend of the police."

"Including the pickpockets,"

Beatty said.

"Which pickpockets?"

"The ones in the second precinct. They sent a delegation to the big cops saying the little cops were shaking them down for too much."

We drove in silence for a time, enjoying the blackness and the ruins.

"Oh, to be a sleuth in Manila," Beatty said at last, "now that April's here."

"It's September," I said.

"Accurate," he said, "ain't you?"

We were silent again, until we got to the canteen. There was a thin little man standing in the light of the doorway, and Beatty stopped the jeep and turned his flashlight on the man's face.

"Paterno?"

"Sir?" The Filipino was smiling.

"Manuel Paterno," Beatty said.

"I do not know him, sir."

"You know him."

"I know him but he has gone."

"Where'd he go?"

"He has gone to the province."

"He was supposed to meet us."

"He has gone to the province with his companion."

"We're CID."

"From the prison?"

"Right."

"I am Paterno," the Filipino said.

"I have been waiting here for you."

"Get in," Beatty said.

Manuel Paterno worked himself into the back seat, quick and wiry, and said, "There are many turns."

"We have made many turns

already," Beatty said sourly.

"The body is in a cemetery," Paterno said, with something like awe in his voice. "It is guarded by a policeman."

"Why?" Beatty said. "The body isn't going anywhere."

I turned around and said, "That's a joke, Manuel. Is it all right if I call you Manuel?"

"Sirs," Manuel said, and smiled and nodded his head several times.

"Start calling out the turns," Beatty said.

In the blackness, we made the many turns, as Paterno directed. Then we came to the cemetery and had to leave the jeep and walk through a forest of headstones and statuary.

"They say this is really something come feast day," Beatty said to me. "Not scared, are you?"

"No," I said. "I brought a bottle."

"Give some to Manuel," Beatty said, and raised his voice. "Ho! Manuel! You with us?"

"I am behind you," Paterno's voice said.

"Well, which bloody way now?" Beatty said.

"Keep going, sirs," Manuel Paterno said.

We nearly fell across the figure of a man, who sat on an oblong headstone, facing the other way. The man jumped up with a cry, and Beatty put his light on his face.

"CID," Beatty said, in a voice that indicated that now, less than a month on the job, he was tired of

saying it. "Special agents Beatty and Heath."

"Ah!" the policeman said. He saluted. "I am Patrolman Cabé of this precinct."

"Where's everybody?"

"The dead man lies at my feet."

Beatty put his light on the body, then back at Cabé. "Everybody else?"

"There is no one else, sir. They are all dead."

"For ruddy bloody sake, is there a homicide division or isn't there?"

"Of course, sir," the policeman said. "Many of the detectives have been here. From the squad."

"And?"

"And, sir?"

"And where'd they go?"

"It is after midnight," Cabé said. "Their duty is finished. They pledged to resume the investigation at four o'clock in the afternoon tomorrow."

Behind us, Manuel Paterno said, "Ah, José. Were you lonely waiting?"

"It is always lonely in a cemetery at night," Cabé said. "How is your mother, Manuel?"

"She has gone to the province," Manuel said.

"Let's see the stiffer," Beatty said, and we bent down. "What is he?"

"The clothes are GI," I said.

"That makes him anything, but an American soldier," Beatty said. "Turn the head. Mind there's blood on the neck. You, Cabé. Let me have your handkerchief."

"Beg pardon," Cabé said, with distaste. "I have no handkerchief."

"Ask Manuel."

"He does not have one either."

"Look at him," I said to Beatty, and I turned my light on the dead man's face.

Beatty looked. "Chinese."

I said, "What does the Manila Police Department have running this time of night?"

"Policemen," Beatty said unhappily.

"We got anything at the prison?"

"A weapons carrier," Beatty said. "It was parked outside the morgue when we left."

"Let's do it with that," I said. "And get the body downtown." I looked up at Cabé. "Who found the body?"

"It is mysterious," Cabé said.

"Somebody must have found it," Beatty said.

"A man," Manuel Paterno said in an obliging voice. "I believe it was a man."

I said, "But by now he has gone to the province."

"With his companion," Beatty said. "See now, the mud on his shoes." He swung his light in an arc over the ground. "They shot him someplace else and dragged him here."

"Cabé," I said, "you stay here. Special Agent Beatty and I will go telephone the morgue. They'll come out and take him off your hands."

Cabé saluted. "Can you officers find your direction to the car?"

"I will lead them," Manuel Paterno said hopefully.

"That's right, Manuel," Beatty said. "You meet the other officers from the morgue at the canteen, same way you did us, and bring them here."

"I will," Paterno said gladly.

"And don't give 'em that snow about you do not know who Manuel Paterno is."

"It is good to be careful," Paterno said.

2.

We went through the cemetery back to where the jeep was, and made the many turns to get back to the canteen. Outside the door to the canteen was a bulletin board with a number of typewritten notices, all in English, and one large proclamation, printed in English on the left side and Chinese on the right, posted here as it had been posted all over Manila.

PROCLAMATION

WHEREAS, the Army of the United States has returned to the City of Manila and as there with the Government of the Commonwealth of the Philippines established law and order; and

WHEREAS, certain Chinese of the City of Manila have since the return of the Army of the United States taken the law unto their own hands and murdered several per-

sons; and

WHEREAS, some persons attempt to falsely justify such killings on the ground that the persons killed collaborated with the Army and People of the Japanese Empire;

NOW THEREFORE, the Office of the Chief of Police of Manila does hereby proclaim and announce:

1. The killing of any individual by any other individual or group without due process of law is contrary to the laws of the Philippine Commonwealth regardless of whether or not the persons killed may have collaborated with or assisted the enemies of the Philippine Commonwealth and the Government of the United States of America.

2. In its function to support justice and to maintain peace and order, the Police Department of the City of Manila will with every resource at its command, hunt down and apprehend persons who have violated the laws of this Commonwealth by committing murder. The Police will not rest in its efforts to apprehend these murderers however long it may take, whether a day, a month or a year.

3. All persons who have information relating to the pro-Japanese activities of any persons whatsoever will bring such information to the proper authorities of the Army of the Philippine Commonwealth and

the Army of the United States. Any person who with such information, takes it upon himself in defiance of the laws and rules of the community, to pass judgment and execute sentence upon traitors, shall be dealt with as a murderer and punished according to the laws of the Commonwealth.

4. Let all persons who have information relating to the commission of any murders or crimes within the City of Manila, come forward to the Police. The information will be treated in confidence until the proper time, and the person giving it will be protected.

5. The Chief of Police calls upon all Chinese citizens residing in the City of Manila to show their courage, honor and civic spirit and to aid in this fight against lawlessness and murder.

Done on this 12th day of July, 1945, corresponding to the 12th day of July of the 34th year of the Republic of China.

It was signed by the American Army colonel who was Chief of Police of Greater Manila.

We went inside the canteen for a cup of coffee and then drove back to Bilibid. In the lab, when we got there, was the report the Filipino detectives of the homicide squad had typed out; they had returned early so as to get the report finished before their four-to-midnight tour ended. The report ended: "Investigation in progress."

"They'll continue the investiga-

tion however long it may take," Beatty said, "whether a day, a month or a year. It says so in the proclamation."

"Here's something," I said. "On the desk."

"Should be a wallet," Beatty said, reading the report now in detail. "Found in the cemetery, but away from the body. Along the path the body seemed to be dragged."

"One of the cops probably dropped it. What's in it?"

"Identification." Beatty was reading from the report, and as he did I took the wallet and emptied its contents on the desk.

"A snapshot," I said. "Night club picture. Four of them at a table."

Beatty came and looked. "One Chinese," he said, reading the picture from left to right, "one girl, one American—an Army officer—another girl. Nice."

"James Wing," I said, from the identification card in the wallet. "Suppose it's the corpse?"

"Must be," Beatty said. "No money in the wallet."

"Remember, it had to come from there to here," I said. "The Manila police are notoriously underpaid."

Will Beatty went back to the report. "Nothing on who found the body. The precinct got a tip."

"Phone?"

"Yes."

"What time?"

"Nine forty-seven."

"Now who's being accurate?"

"I'm only reading what it says,"

Beatty said. "Besides, I'm feeling sorry for you. It's your turn in the barrel."

"Not me alone," I said. "We both examine the contents of the dead gentleman's stomach. Two heads are better than one."

"Not when they are examining the contents of dead gentlemen's stomachs," Beatty said. "Haven't they worked autopsies to a better science than this?"

"Not in the Mysterious East," I said.

"Personally," Beatty said, "I don't see what good it does. So you've got a chance of being able to tell what time the sweet stizzo was killed. What does it prove?"

"Not a thing," I said. "Except that our task is to teach the fine points to the local sleuths, so we can withdraw with honor."

"Then let them examine the contents of the dead gentleman's stomach," Beatty said.

Remembering these things now, with the rain outside the window more than a decade later, you remember it was something of a pastime, a hobby almost, to deride the native police. Many of them were new recruits, and they had much to learn, and the pay was bad. Yet here in Chicago today, if a call came from a difficult outlying section and a man was supposed to meet me there to show me the way, I wonder if he would meet me or not. Paterno, merely

a friend of the police, had met us in Quezon City as he had promised, and he met the morgue truck too, and they brought the body in and by noon we knew that James Wing had been alive for his supper, or at least his four o'clock *merienda*, the day before. While the autopsy was being conducted by an Army pathologist and the Filipino medical examiner, we learned also that James Wing was in truth James Wing, for his fingerprints were on file with the police. So, quickly we knew everything we wanted to know, except the identity of the killer and where we could get an additional supply of ice to preserve the bodies in the morgue. But there was nothing unique about this. Murderers and ice were, of all things in Manila, Pearl of the Orient, most wanted.

The Criminal Investigation laboratory was one of the several Bilibid buildings that were laid out in the shape of a wagon wheel without a hub. All of the buildings in the prison were alike in structure, one-story, high-ceilinged, with walls of concrete pierced with slatted iron bars for windows. The Army had sent to similar laboratories in the United States for bills of equipment, and had laid out the CI lab to match the most modern of our own. It was a long building, front-to-back, and on the left as you came in there were girl receptionists and typists, with filing cabinets, then Will Beatty's office, the chemistry

laboratory, and the room for toxicology and serology. On the right side of the main corridor, from front to back, were the ballistics section, a room for confiscated weapons, and the photo lab. It was a routine, dull place until the order went out that our laboratory was to test samples of all liquor sold locally, because the Japanese had left behind large quantities of wood alcohol, and there were reports of people being poisoned and going blind from natively bottled whiskey. As soon as our testing process proved that a given bottle was all right, the day would lighten.

Beatty and I were conducting a follow-up test of this nature in his office, toward nighttime, when the phone rang. Beatty took it, pipe in mouth, and said, "Beatty here. Yes? Oh? No. No. No. Wait a minute till I write that down." And he wrote an address on a piece of paper and said into the telephone, "All right. We'll be there. We'll? Special Agent Heath and myself. Right." He rang off and looked at me. "Joachim Garcia. Ever hear of him?"

"No. Why did you keep saying no into the phone?"

"I never heard of him either. He seemed disappointed."

"Who is he?"

"James Wing's ex-boss. Or ex-James Wing's boss, if you prefer."

"Why should I have heard of him? Is everybody supposed to know James Wing?"

Will Beatty pulled at his pipe. "No. Everybody's supposed to know James Wing's ex-former-boss. Wing was his chauffeur." He looked at the slip of paper on the desk. "Nice address. Malate."

"He wants to see us?"

"Yes." Beatty picked up the phone and got the girl out front and said, "I am going to the province with my companion. We'll check with you later." Then he stuffed a tin of tobacco into his coat pocket and stood up and we went out and got into the jeep. I said to him, "Mind the puddles, chappie."

3.

I could tell why Joachim Garcia thought we should have known who he was. We should have. He had a large, square, stucco house, done Spanish style, and it was set off-center in what seemed a small-scale garden forest, complete with winding hard-surface driveway, and there were two house boys at the front door, one to take the jeep and the other to show us in. It was right out of *Charlie Chan at Honolulu*. You expected Sidney Toler to come in, smiling and nodding and saying, "Interruption, please. Man who trust donkey often get kicked."

We got shown into an immense, mahogany-paneled drawing room with the biggest grand piano I'd ever seen, and it led onto a terrace

and you could see the bay, studded with lights, in the not-too-distant distance. From the terrace, a small, quick-footed man, with a gray shirt and a blue tie and knife-creased slacks of off-gray, came toward us. He was smiling, and he had a drink in his hand; and obviously he knew how to get ice.

"Gentlemen," he said. "The Criminal Investigators." We shook hands and he said, "You are welcome. I am Joachim Garcia." His English was perfect; impeccable, and yet not the forced perfect English of the native scholar. I suppose he was about forty-five or fifty years of age. He had a high, many-creased forehead, and despite his name there was a near-European aspect to his face, in the eyes and the cheekbones. "We are all anxious to meet you," he said, and nodded toward the terrace and added, "My whiskey is pre-war," which is a sentence that sounds banal today, but then, at that time, was itself the very essence of aristocracy.

We went out on the terrace, and Beatty said, "I'm sorry. I didn't know it was a party."

"Nothing," Joachim Garcia said. "Nothing at all. Mrs. Garcia. Lieutenant Colonel Wade and Major Rossiter of the American Army. My niece, Nela." We said hello to everybody while Garcia was intoning our names. "Special Agents Beatty and Heath. They are helping the police restore order. Special Agent Heath is a sergeant in the

Army, a Chicago policeman now on detached assignment for assistance in the Homicide Bureau of the Manila Police. Special Agent Beatty is an Australian civilian, acting as chief of the Criminal Investigation Laboratory. Now, gentlemen. Scotch?"

"We should've dressed," Beatty husked in my ear.

"In what?" I hushed back. We said Scotch would be all right. The two women, Mrs. Garcia and the girl Nela, and the officers, Wade and Rossiter, were handsomely dressed for the occasion, the more so in contrast to the working khakis of Beatty and myself. Mrs. Garcia was a slender woman with a tired doll's face; she was in her late thirties or forties. The girl, Nela, was barely in her twenties; her face was even and honest, and not unpretty, and she was taller than her aunt. She wore a simple blue dress, with a lace shawl upon her bare shoulders.

We small-talked for a bit, and everybody said how glad a thing it was that the war was over. Beatty said to Garcia, "You seem to know all about Al Heath and myself."

Garcia nodded amiably. "I do. I know exactly what you're doing in Manila. What I do not understand is why. The reason for it."

"Assignment," Beatty said, looking at his pipe, but watching Garcia too.

"The Manila Police are not properly equipped?"

"The equipment is fine."

"They have enough men?"

"More than enough."

"And chemists and doctors and scientists?"

"They have those too."

Then it would seem to me they need no help."

"The organization is bad," Beatty said. "That's the help we're trying to give."

"I have a friend high up in the police," Garcia said. For some reason, this made Wade and Rossiter, the two American officers, laugh and prod each other. "Inspector Macalindung. You know of him?"

"We've met him," Will Beatty said.

"Is he capable?"

"Very capable."

"We were conversing, Inspector Macalindung and I," Garcia said, "only the other day. He seemed to think the organization of the department was sufficient."

Beatty shrugged and sipped at his highball. "Did you call him about your chauffeur?"

"Wing?" Garcia paused and shook his head in sadness. "It is a terrible thing, murder."

"Yes," Beatty said. "Did you call Macalindung?"

"No. Should I have?"

"You said he was a friend of yours."

"I called his office. They gave me the names of you gentlemen. They said the matter was yours."

Beatty nodded, and Lieutenant Colonel Wade, a tall, balding man with a flat Southwest accent, said, "Why *would* two special agents like yourselves get involved in a murder like that? Just another Chinese. They must have twenty of them a day."

"We weren't interested in the dead man, mate," Beatty said to him. "Not per se. Didn't know him from the year one. It's the police operation we're interested in."

Wade said to Garcia, "Did I ever meet him? Your chauffeur?"

"Perhaps," Garcia said. He shrugged. "He may have driven you from one place to another. Well." He turned back to Beatty and me. "Did you know he had been marked for death?"

"Who?" I said. "Wing?"

Garcia nodded thoughtfully. "The Chinese have a system here. They place notices on the bulletin boards in public places. The notices call a man every conceivable kind of name. All kinds of dog and other animal. Then, having been insulted in this manner, he knows beforehand that he is to be killed."

Beatty moistened his lips. "How'd you find out?"

"One of the house boys told me."

"Before or after Wing was killed?"

"After," Garcia said. "I heard this afternoon."

I said, "Was he a collaborator?"

Joachim Garcia smiled and looked out toward the bay. "Justice

can be an unusual thing."

Major Rossiter, a small, pudgy man with eyes that had almost no white to them, said, "I knew Wing. He'd driven me a dozen times or more. Never knew he was a collaborator, though."

A house boy in a white coat came on the terrace and bowed deferentially and said, "Dinner, please."

"Ah," Garcia said, and crooked his arm out for his wife. "Dorothea? Nela? Gentlemen?"

We let them precede us, Mrs. Garcia on her husband's arm and the girl Nela flanked by Rossiter and Wade. I said to Beatty, "Will, do you poor benighted Australians know what a straight line is?"

"If you mean that conversation," Beatty said, "then I saw it too."

"Wade's the same American that was in the night club picture with Wing."

"And he made a point of saying he hardly knew him," Beatty said.

"Get ready for the turtle soup," I said, and we went inside with the others.

"I," Joachim Garcia was saying, "am willing to let what is past be what is past. Even though I spit at the feet of a Japanese."

"Mr. Garcia's a big lumber man," Major Rossiter said to me. "They bombed his biggest plantation. No reason. Just bombed it to hell."

"The pilot was aiming for the railway," Mrs. Garcia said, and smiled quickly and at once stopped

smiling.

"Killed the foreman," Rossiter said. "The foreman was Nela's daddy here. She's not really Garcia's niece. He just took her in, is all."

"Harry," Garcia said to Rossiter.

"I just want these boys to know you're all right," Rossiter said, and seated himself heavily at the table.

"There is no necessity," Garcia said. He smiled at us from the head of the table. "Our food is not all one might wish. But I am able to offer you both butter and ice cream."

"Sweet happy day," Beatty said. "I could make a meal of nothing else."

"Butter and ice cream," I said. It was to marvel. "You've got both?"

"The Chinese have a saying," Garcia said. "'Happiness never comes single.'"

Nela, the girl, said, "But that is not the complete saying."

"It is sufficient to the occasion," Garcia said.

I looked at her. "What's the complete saying?"

She looked at Garcia, then back at me. "'Happiness never comes single, but misfortune does.'"

There were courses of chicken and pork and wild rice, with sweet and sour sauces. At the end there was ice cream, and coffee brewed luxuriously strong. Then we all went into the drawing room, and the house boy brought brandy. Mrs.

Garcia sat down at the piano, and I went over and leaned on my elbows and listened to her play.

"You are young," she said to me.

"Twenty-seven."

She smiled to herself. "My husband likes you. He told me so."

"I'm awfully pleased."

"He likes to help people he likes."

"Do I need help?"

"Perhaps not now."

"But some day, maybe?"

She smiled again, and her eyes went back to the keyboard.

"That is," I added, "if he keeps on liking me."

She said nothing. I looked across the room and saw that Will Beatty had Nela off in a corner. He was in full operation, which surprised me not at all, talking rapidly and smiling archly at the girl, and gesticulating with his pipe.

Mrs. Garcia turned and looked too. She said to me, "Your friend is very handsome."

"Yes," I said. "It's too bad about your chauffeur."

"Ah, well," she said "One hardly uses a chauffeur these days, with fuel so difficult to obtain. Joachim is learning to ride a bicycle. You should see him."

"This lieutenant colonel," I said. "Officer Wade. You know him well?"

"They are companions of my husband, he and Major Rossiter. They are pleasant company. Major Rossiter sings."

"I would like to hear Lieutenant Colonel Wade sing," I said.

"He says he does not like to sing."

"I believe it."

"It is very difficult for us sometimes to understand your sense of humor."

"Why did your husband invite us out here?"

"But you know that yourself. It was his chauffeur who has been murdered."

"He could have told us that over the phone. Matter of fact, he did."

"And the part about being marked for death?"

"The phone can be used for this too."

Dorothea Garcia shrugged her white shoulders. "My husband likes to meet interesting people, such as you and your companion. Also it is a question of hospitality. When one wishes to speak with another, it is nice to invite the other one to one's home. Do you believe this?"

"I'm asking," I said, "not complaining."

"The food was to your taste?"

"Everything's fine."

"I am happy." She stood up and moved away from the piano. Wade, Rossiter and Joachim Garcia were seated in chairs grouped around the coffee table. Garcia looked up at me and smiled and said. "Ah, the American agent. Do you play chess?"

"No," I said.

"Cards?"

"Gin rummy."

"You like to gamble?"

"Sometimes."

"Horses?"

"Why? You got a track?"

"Unfortunately, no," Garcia said.

"We hope to resume before long. Now they have turned the Jockey Club into a hospital." He sighed.

"They're one or two nice night clubs," Lieutenant Colonel Wade said.

"I know," I said. "I saw a picture of you in one."

"Really?"

"That's right. You were with Wing. The chauffeur that got it."

Wade gazed at me. Then he looked at Garcia and grinned. "Is *that* who that was? I didn't know that was Wing."

"I am at a loss," Garcia said. "I fail to follow the conversation."

"We ought not to talk about it here," I said. "Would you like to come downtown with us for a little while?"

Garcia said, "Please. Is a procedure of this kind necessary?"

"More or less," I said.

"I like to think we are all gentlemen," Garcia said.

"We are," I said.

"It pains me to see a friend in difficulty."

"No particular reason to think he's in difficulty," I said. "We just want to talk. All right, Colonel."

"I'll get my cap," Wade said. He

stood up and left the room.

"Really," Garcia staid, moving his hands about aimlessly. "I am truly embarrassed."

"Don't give it a second thought," I said. "He shouldn't have any trouble establishing where he was yesterday afternoon, and that'll do it. Only thing is, now that he knows who Wing is—or was—he may be able to help us a little. You know."

"I admire the spirit of your work," Garcia said. "You are going to have to come to visit us soon again." He looked over to where Will Beatty was still jawing away with Nela. "You and your Australian friend."

"Don't mind him," I said. "No doubt he is telling her about the many wonders of Australia. This takes time."

"Perhaps you would want to tell him you are leaving."

"It requires tact," I agreed. "Hey, Beatty! Hay-up!"

Will Beatty turned around, blinking.

"It's that time," I said. "Lieutenant Colonel Wade is going to drive back to town with us."

"Your companion thinks this is necessary," Garcia said to Beatty.

"He does, does he?" Beatty said, and he gave me a look. Then he turned to Nela and said, "We're going to have to talk some more."

I said, "Wade must be having trouble finding his cap."

The major, the one named

Rossiter, said, "I know where it is," and went out of the room, and Beatty turned to Garcia and said, "It was charming. We loved every minute."

"Another brandy before you go?" Garcia said.

"No," I said, and gave Beatty the eye. "Thank you just the same."

"I insist," Garcia said.

"We can't," Beatty said. "Really."

From outside somewhere, there was the sound of an auto engine starting up. Beatty looked around the room.

"If you really have to go," Garcia said, "perhaps we can..."

Beatty said, "Who's that? The car?"

Garcia looked mildly surprised. "The car?"

"The one driving away." Beatty moved quickly to the terrace, but the driveway was hidden in the undergrowth to the left. I turned and went out into the hall, and there was the house boy with the white coat. I said, "Was that them?"

"Pardon you, sir?" the house boy said.

"The two Army officers. The Americans."

"They have gone, sir."

"Where?"

"In their jeep."

Beatty came out of the drawing room and said, "What is it?"

"It was them," I said.

Beatty looked behind him and saw Joachim Garcia. "Now, this isn't solving anything," the Austra-

lian said. "Where's the phone?"

"In there," his host said, pointing. "Whom did you wish to speak to?"

"Me old granny," Beatty said, and went in to the library, across the hall from the drawing room, and I could hear him calling downtown to have a check run on Wade and Rossiter.

"I fail to understand," Joachim Garcia said to me, "why the gentlemanly officer Wade would be seen in a night club with my chauffeur."

"The gentlemanly officer Wade," I said, "left like he'd been shot out of a cannon. Maybe we ought to know some more about him. How'd you come to meet him?"

"At the Officers' Club in Malate," Garcia said. "My wife and I were guests of other officers, and friendships were formed."

"Those two here often?"

Garcia spread his palms. "We have visited several times. I believe Major Rossiter was interested in the company of my niece Nela."

"Does Major Rossiter always carry a gun?"

"A gun?"

"Either that or the major has an unfortunate tumor beneath the left armpit. Perhaps he has gone to the doctor for treatment."

"You are being humorous," Garcia said.

"I'm deadly," I said.

Beatty came back into the hall. He said to me, "I left this number. They're going to call."

"We were talking," I said, "about

Colonel Wade and the dead Mr. Wing. Mr. Garcia has no idea what they might have been night-clubbing together for. You?"

"Not a clue," Beatty said. "What disturbs me is that the picture was in the wallet at all." He smiled blandly at Garcia. "Perhaps I'm worrying too much."

Garcia shrugged. "We can rejoin the ladies. If you are expecting a telephone call, perhaps you will be eager to forget your duties for a time until the telephone call comes." He led the way back into the drawing room. "I imagine you are both eager to return to your homelands, now that the war is over."

"It may be beginning all over again," Beatty said.

"More deadly humor," I said to Garcia.

"Ah," he said. "Well, I envy you your jokes." He nodded to the Chinese house boy. "More brandy."

Dorothea Garcia was at the piano again, and Will Beatty was at Nela, across the room. After a while the two of them wandered out onto the terrace, and the Chinese boy came in with a piece of paper rolled in his hand and started a conference with Garcia.

"Household matters," Garcia's wife said, and smiled up at me. "Wasn't that extraordinary, the behavior of our two friends?"

"You've seen it in the movies," I said. "They call it the lammo."

"We do not get to see as many movies as we would like."

I looked around the room. "You seem to have lived through the unpleasantness, what with one thing and another. Butter and ice cream."

"The Japanese were not difficult with residences when they were here." She was watching her husband. "They commandeered two of my husband's plantations and forced us to provide quarters for four of their officers, but they enjoy luxury as much as anyone."

"How'd your husband get along with them?"

"Pleasel" Her eyes grew bright. "They killed some of his employees. One does not accept the death of an employee without anger."

"One seems to accept the death of Mr. Wing."

Garcia came over to the piano with the house boy. "We are speaking of Wing?"

"We are."

"This paper," Garcia said, and gestured with his brandy glass toward the scroll the house boy had in his hand, "speaks also of Wing. It was just now found, tacked against the door of the servants' quarters."

The house boy nodded eagerly and unrolled the paper, showing a series of penciled Chinese characters.

"When a man is marked for death in Manila," Garcia said, "two proclamations are issued. The first boasts that he will be killed."

The Chinese servant nodded solemnly. "Oh, very bad," he said.

"The second," Garcia said, "boasts that the kill has taken place."

"Most unfortunate," the house boy said.

"So you see," Garcia said to me. "They must have viewed Wing as a collaborator."

"A collaborator who's seen in night clubs with American Army officers."

"A man of many parts," Garcia agreed.

The phone rang inside, and I said, "Maybe that's Beatty's call."

"The boy will answer," Garcia said. He smiled in the direction of the terrace. "Special Agent Beatty seems to be involved."

"Your niece doesn't seem to mind."

"Nela?" Garcia's voice sounded almost angry. "She is a child. She does not know what she wants."

"Claude Rains does that line better," I said to him.

"I beg your pardon?"

"Nela. She is a child. She does not know what she wants. A few dates with Beatty..."

Garcia turned away. "I am afraid there will be no dates with your friend Special Agent Beatty."

The house boy came and said the phone call was for Mrs. Garcia, and she went inside to take it.

"Nela does not go away from this house," Garcia said to me. "She prefers it that way. You think it is funny, but she has known tragedy and shock, and she does

not want to see the world of soldiers and guns and ruins. Here..." he waved his hand "...here at least we have preserved tranquility."

"Tranquility?" I said. "The chauffeur gets shot, the two American officers disappear into the night, the boy comes with the death notice somebody nailed to the door. Just an average tranquil evening."

"No," Garcia said. "You still think it is funny. But this is not an average evening, and I have reason to believe it has been tranquil nonetheless."

"Maybe in comparison to other things."

"When bombs have killed your father, things exist in comparison to other things."

Dorothea Garcia appeared regally in the doorway. She said, "That was Lieutenant Colonel Wade, Mr. Heath. He wished to apologize for his hurried departure, as well as for the hurried departure of his friend."

I looked at her. "Where is he?"

"He did not say. He promised to communicate with you in the morning."

"Did he say why he left?"

"It was an engagement of a pressing nature."

"Ah, come on," I said. "What is this dialogue?"

"Mr. Heath," Garcia said to me, "you have a bitter tongue. It verges upon insult."

"Look," I said, "all I'm trying to do is do what they want me to do

so I can go back to Chicago. That sounds ridiculous, I know, but there it is."

Garcia and his wife exchanged looks. He said, "If I thought you were really anxious to leave, then we could talk quite seriously."

I looked at him.

"You are eligible to return home?" Garcia said to me.

"I was eligible a month ago."

"Ah," he said, "I know. The transportation situation."

Mrs. Garcia said, "You must miss your wife and family, Mr. Heath."

"I have no wife and family."

"So?" Garcia said. "And still eligible to return so soon?"

"I've been in a long time. Seen combat. So forth."

"Transportation can be arranged for bachelors too," Garcia said to his wife.

I said, "Legally?"

Garcia gave me a blank stare. "That is a funny word in Manila. I assume you talk as a soldier who wishes to return to his home. Or do you talk as a policeman?"

"A policeman," I said. "I'm a stinker at heart."

"In that case," Garcia said smoothly, "I would advise you to discuss your problem with your unit commander. Perhaps he can expedite your transportation."

"And if I didn't talk as a policeman?"

"In that case," Garcia said, "I might be able to be of some service."

"How?"

"It is possible that I have met your commander. I could speak to him in your behalf."

"Is that all?"

"Did you expect something else?"

"Yes."

"I regret to have disappointed you," Garcia said. "On the other hand, something suggests to me that you may not be as desperate to return home as many of your fellow countrymen. Do I detect that for one reason or another you like it here in Manila?"

"You detect nothing of the sort," I said.

"But you are willing to wait your turn—or perhaps even longer to return to your country?"

"Perhaps."

"Correct me," Garcia said, "if I am in error, but it seems to me a special agent such as yourself would have access to the proper transportation by virtue of his line of work alone."

"What does that mean?"

He shrugged. "Perhaps as a special agent you are licensed to the masters of various Liberty Ships, for example, so that you can travel unimpeded in your work."

"You guess good."

"It was not totally a guess." He smiled. "And yet you choose to remain here. And your friend Mr. Beatty chooses to remain as well, although he has even less reason, being a civilian who may leave whenever he pleases. It is difficult for me to perceive your motives."

"You'd never believe them if I told you," I said.

"Make the attempt."

"You fight a war for something," I said. "You try to leave a place in a little better shape than the way you found it. I do this kind of thing better with a viola."

"Ah," Garcia said. "I am sure I understand. Patriotism and the dignity of man. Seeing the job through. Sincerely I salute you." The phone broke off his speech, and this time the boy came and said it was for Beatty. Beatty came in from the terrace, pipe in mouth, looking natty as ever. He went on in to the other room to take the call, and I moved to the door of the terrace and saw Nela standing there, looking straight ahead toward the lights of the bay.

I said, "How's everything?" and she turned, startled, and I said, "Say now. You're crying."

"Yes," she said, very quietly, and nodded her head. "I am crying."

"Beatty's all right," I said, not knowing quite what to say. "He didn't mean anything."

"It was not Mr. Beatty's fault."

"Do you want to come inside?"

"No. Thank you." She shook her head. "No."

I went over and stood beside her at the outer wall of the terrace. "This wasn't quite the social evening the Garcias had planned, I suppose. I'm sorry."

"I should be the one who is sorry," she said. She put a handker-

chief to her eyes and said, "You are a good man, Mr. Heath, you and your friend. I am deeply grateful."

"For what?"

"It is difficult to explain."

"Everything in this house is difficult to explain," I said. "From where they get the butter on up. I'm sorry. Everything I say sounds like jokes."

"No," Nela said. "All that it sounds is bitter."

Will Beatty came out from the drawing room and said, "All set, Al. Let's get cracking."

I looked doubtfully at Nela.

"We'll be back to see Nela," Beatty said. "Nela and I made a deal."

"I almost made one with the uncle," I said.

"Let's talk about it in the car." He nodded at Nela. "Stay loose, princess."

We went through the drawing room to the hall and Garcia came after us and said, "Did you learn what you wanted to know?"

"Everything," Beatty said. "We can't thank you enough, Special Agent Heath and myself. For dinner and everything. It was simply grand."

"You will have to join us soon again," Dorothea Garcia said. "Perhaps we can have a more sociable time."

"With fewer official cares," her husband said.

"We'd be delighted," Beatty said. "Is the boy getting the jeep?"

"He has already been instructed," Garcia said. "Did you learn where to locate the American officers?"

"Why, no," Beatty said blandly, "but I'm sure they're anxious to cooperate."

"I didn't tell you," I said to him. "Colonel Wade called a little while ago. Said he was awfully sorry, but he'd get in touch in the morning."

"See?" Beatty said. "No problem. No problem at all."

The jeep drove up outside, and we said good night and got in and drove along the curving driveway toward the avenue outside.

I said to Beatty, "What was the—"

"Scrounge!" he said. "Scrounge down!"

The jeep leaped into high gear, and we went careening over the hard-surfaced road. Whoever was shooting at us had time for only three shots before we got to the end of the driveway, and here Beatty faked the right turn that would have taken us back to town and then, instead, turned left and put the accelerator to the floor, and we roared away in the blackness of the night.

"Now," he said at last, "now *that's* behind us, the bloody little sonofabitch..."

I said, "Wade?"

He shrugged: "CID checked. There is no Lieutenant Colonel Wade."

I looked at him. "What about the other one?"

"No Major Rossiter either."

Here in Chicago it is more than a decade since I have seen Harry Rossiter, and yet his image from that time in Manila remains clear. I suppose he has changed, as I have changed, and yet from the charges against him I take it he has not changed enough, and maybe that applies to me too. Yet I have no hate for Rossiter—no hate for anyone—because things are as they are, and memory, that useful agent, is nonetheless deceiving, for you remember too much the highlights and not enough the shadows in between.

We did not really learn about Rossiter and his friend Lieutenant Colonel Wade, not at once. We knew at once that CID did not list them as American officers in the Philippines, but that was not, at that time with the war newly ended, a wholly reliable index. But things began to tie together, and in the morning Will Beatty went to see Inspector Macalindung of the Manila Police, the one Garcia claimed was a friend of his.

I was in the lab at the prison when Beatty called.

"I'm with Macalindung."

"Has he offered you free transportation back to Australia?"

"No, he's all right. A good sort. Smart."

"What's he got to say?"

"Says Garcia's worth a lot of

money, for one thing."

"Does he want to try for two dollars?"

"Says he's been helpful. Knew which Chinese businessmen were working with the Japs when they were here."

"Turn them in?"

"Regularly," Beatty said cheerfully.

"That's one way to get rid of competition in your business," I said.

"I thought you'd see it that way," Beatty said. "There was also some unpleasantness during the war. Unpleasantness of another sort."

"Ah?"

"Mrs. Garcia," Beatty said. "They billeted some Jap officers out at the estate. She seems to have been a more than accommodating hostess. There was talk about it here and there."

"She do it willingly or because Garcia told her to?"

"Negative," Beatty said. "Macalindung doesn't know."

"What about the girl?"

"Nela?"

For no real reason that I could trace at the time, I felt my throat go tight. "Was she the perfect hostess too?"

"Negative," Beatty said again. "Macalindung thinks she didn't come to Manila till only recently."

"Does he like Garcia personally?"

"Like you like a snake."

"Trust him?"

"Nope."

"Got anything on him?"

"No. At least, I don't think so. He's a rum type, this Macalindung. Smokes a pipe, like me."

"That makes him champion."

"Right you are. He just more or less sits back and smiles and waits. Good cop. Knows more than eight other johnnies put together."

"Does he know who was shooting at us last night?"

"No," Beatty said. "He doesn't think it was Wade or Rossiter."

"Why not?"

"He thinks they took off as fast and as far as they could."

"Ah," I said. "Lieutenant Colonel Wade has left for the province with his companion."

"We already did that," Beatty said. "Macalindung did say Garcia probably has more guns lying around his house than we have in the confiscated room at the lab."

"How many people in Garcia's house know how to shoot the things?"

"Judging from last night's performance," Beatty said, "I'd say none of them knew how very well."

"Maybe they were just trying to scare us."

"Right you are. Also maybe the moon is made of Gouda Cheese."

"Well," I said, "you talk fine but you don't learn much."

"I learn plenty allee samee. Macalindung has a friend."

"Oh?"

"Oh. Chinese. Name of Lum."

"Spell that."

"Lum," Beatty said. "Hanged if I know how to spell it."

"What does Lum do?"

"Counter-intelligence."

"Ah. The plot congeals."

"No it doesn't. Macalindung talked to Lum, and Lum said as far as he can find out—preliminary check and all that—chauffeur Wing *wasn't* marked for death."

"You mean there were no announcements?"

"Nope."

"No clustering around the bulletin boards in Chinatown?"

"None."

"No copy writer saying what a dog of a son of a dog Wing was?"

"Not that Lum knows about."

"Then what was that scroll the house boy brought in last night?"

"I don't know. I was out on the balcony."

"I told you about it. Somebody tacked it to the back door. Said Wing, the collaborating son of a collaborator, had been done in."

"The house boy probably wrote it in the kitchen."

"Why?"

"I don't know. Maybe he's a frustrated novelist."

"*Was* Wing a collaborator?"

"Not that Lum knows."

"So that clears Wing. At least the dead man's hands are clean."

"Wrong again. He was a big bloke in the black market. Really big."

"Wheels within wheels," I said. "I'll be seeing you."

"Good. I want to talk to you about Nela."

"My pleasure," I said, and rang off, and sat there at the desk for a time, reading a copy of the newest mimeographed delight from headquarters. It was addressed to me, among several other special agents. It said:

CONFIDENTIAL

HEADQUARTERS

BASE SECTION USASOS

OFFICE OF THE

INSPECTOR GENERAL

SUBJECT: Allegations of Illegal Sale of Area Air Travel Priorities.

TO: Commanding General, RESOS.

1. A number of discharged Personnel are arriving at this installation from forward Bases without proper orders, and possessing air priorities secured as a result of payment of varying amounts of money to responsible individuals. Others, with proper orders, are also paying for priorities.

2. Four former Civilian Maritime Personnel at Base "G", whose statements are attached hereto, paid \$35 to \$75 to secure such priorities.

3. Pertinent documentary evidence pertaining to this matter is submitted herewith.

There followed seventeen pages of enclosures, and it made me particularly happy to be involved with the Wing murder at this moment, because if anyone got the idea I was idle I could be transferred to this paper hunt. I still remembered

the merry-go-round we had trying to track down the villains who had somehow got hold of a copy of page 2 of the surrender document signed aboard the USS Missouri. The only thing that chase produced was several hundred additional photostated copies of the page alleged to have been copied, so that all we investigators could know what we were looking for.

Nonetheless, the new mimeographed rocket from headquarters reminded me at once of Garcia's line of talk about getting me some early travel papers home. Not that he'd said anything worth listening to, but the subject now had come up twice, from totally different directions, inside of twelve hours.

The phone rang, and it was the girl at the desk out front. The whole lab setup, copying so faithfully similar labs back in the states, was ridiculous, because the only thing we had four walls separating the different rooms were beaverboard partitions that stopped a good ten feet short of ceiling height. So you could hear the girl in the next office without having to use a telephone. But we were there for the methodology and so we always used the phone.

The girl outside said there was some one there to see me. I went out into the hall and on into the front room, and the some one there was Nela.

She looked better today than she had last night, which is a statement

of some consequence. She wore a fragile piña blouse, with a wide black belt and white linen skirt, and she had no hat. She looked at me with something of the same frightened, dark eyes that I had seen the night before, and the girls at the desks were looking at both of us.

I said, "Hi. Want to see me?"

She nodded, and her eyes took in the beaverboard walls and I understood she did not want to do any talking here in the lab. So I said, "Wait here a minute," and went inside and got my sun helmet. For no good reason at all, I went inside to the confiscated weapons room and picked out the smallest gun I could find, a snub-nosed .32 automatic, loaded it, and put it in my right pants pocket. Then I took the gun out again, pumped the first bullet into the chamber, put on the safety, stuck the thing back in my pocket, and went on back out front.

"Come on," I said to Nela. "We'll go for a ride." To the girls I said, "If Agent Beatty calls, I went riding with the niece who isn't a niece. Can you remember that?"

They nodded, laughing and all teeth, that they could remember it, and I opened the door for Nela and we went out and got in the jeep, and outside, we turned right on Quezon Boulevard, stopped for the traffic at Azcarraga, continued down to the Pasig, crossed by the Jones Bridge, and went down Taft

and over to Dewey. Nela said, "Where are we going?" and I said, "No place special. I thought we might walk out on the breakwater or something." She looked a little concerned, and then I realized we would be close once again to the Garcia house.

"The hell with it," I said. "The last place he'll look for you is right in front of his face." Then I added, "Anyway, we're not that close." When I stopped the jeep, we got out and walked out on the breakwater where we could get a good look at the bay and all the ships, the kind that were still floating and the other kind. Down the bay you could see the rock face of Corridor.

We sat down on a rock near the end of the breakwater, and Nela smoothed her skirt down over her long straight legs and rested on her elbows with her head back, and breathed in as though this particular air was particularly free.

I said to her, "Did you have any trouble getting away?"

"He does not know I left," she said. "I paid one of the boys to drive me."

I asked what seemed, for some reason that now, looking back, makes no sense, the next logical question: "Where'd you get the money to pay him?"

"From my uncle's wife Dorothea."

"She gave it to you?"

"No. I took it from her room."

"She'll like that when she finds out."

"She will not find out."

"Why not?"

"This was some time ago. I have had the money since. I have been saving it."

"I take it you don't leave home much."

"I have been to the city several times, and once for a week-end at Baguio in the mountains, but each time they were with me."

"Garcia and his wife?"

She nodded.

"What'll happen when you get home today?"

"I will tell them I went for a walk."

"What if the boy tells them he drove you?"

"He would be punished. He will not tell them."

"What kind of a house is that? It sounds like a jail."

"It is a jail."

"Why go back at all?"

She looked out over the water. "There is nothing else for some one like me," she said. "Not now. Not in times like these. Where else would I go?"

"Well, why has he got you there at all? Or is that a personal question?" I offered her a cigarette, but she shook her head. I said, "You don't have to answer that."

"I am bait," she said. It struck her as funny, and she laughed. "Is that the word for it?"

"Depends on for what."

"My uncle," she said—she said "uncle" in quotation marks—"has me in to meet all his important friends. The ones he does business with."

"Oh?"

She nodded seriously. "They like to come to the house. The two American officers, Lieutenant Colonel Wade and Major Rossister, especially. Each of them has spoken to me several times. They have made several offers."

"Propositions?"

She nodded, although I doubt she divined the meaning of the word.

"And?" I said, "What happens?"

She laughed. "Nothing. My uncle encourages them, and they always come back, thinking perhaps I shall be ready to go away with them. But I am never ready."

"And meanwhile?"

"They merely do business with my uncle. This is what I started to tell Mr. Beatty last night." She smiled. "We did not talk very much about it. He told me of the wonders of other places in the world, the places he thought some day I should see. That was when you saw me crying."

I put my hand on hers, awkwardly, but she let it stay there. I said, "You have no family?"

"No. I had two brothers. Everyone is dead as a result of the war."

"Oh," I said, and looked at the water for a time. "You're from here? Manila?"

She shook her head. "Mindanao. The city of Zamboanga."

"I hear it's beautiful there."

"It is." She looked at me. "Do you know the song the children sing?"

"No," I said.

She began to hum, then to sing the Tagalog words. She stopped, then said in English, "The song says not to go to Zamboanga, because there you forget your loved one."

We were both embarrassed, for some damn reason. I said, "You were talking about Garcia and the two Americans. They did business together?"

"Yes," she said seriously. "I wanted to tell you about it. My uncle had promised the one officer, Lieutenant Colonel Wade, that he could take me away with him."

"I thought he never let things reach that stage."

"This time he did."

I thought about it. "What do you mean, 'take me away with him'?"

"Not to be married," Nela said.

"And weren't you supposed to have anything to say about it?"

"I am dependent on the Garcias for everything. Without them I have nothing."

"Well, dammit, nobody has to live that way."

"That is what your companion Mr. Beatty said last night."

"Do you know what kind of business your uncle had with Wade and Rossister?"

"No. It involved many papers."

"Papers?"

"My uncle kept the papers in his house. The officers Wade and Rossister came to the house frequently and took papers away with them."

I thought about it. "You say your uncle kept holding you out as bait, but never actually carried through. Why didn't he?"

"Because he never had to," Nela said. "He got what he wanted through promises alone. That way, he knew I would cooperate with him and be social in the company of his friends. Because he left it to me to trust him never to let anything pass the stage of promises."

"But with Wade it was different."

"Yes. I overheard him discussing it with Dorothea. He said Lieutenant Colonel Wade was being difficult."

I stood up. "Come on. We'll get something to eat and take a walk in the park or something. I want to call downtown for a minute."

There was an MP check point near the breakwater, and I used the phone there to call downtown. Beatty had called in looking for me, but left no message. I thought about what there was to do next and decided there was nothing particular to do next, so I went out and said to Nela, "How soon do you have to be back?"

"I should not stay away too long."

"Why not?"

"It will be hard to explain going

for a walk that takes all the day."

"Suppose I drive you up to the front door and tell them you were with me? What are they going to do about it?"

"Nothing. Nothing while you are there."

"No?" I said. "Listen. You got a bathing suit?"

She looked at me, surprised. "A bathing suit?"

"You like to swim, don't you? And it's hot enough."

"The only suit I have is at the house."

I grinned. "My mistake. I think the wrong way. I carry some khaki trunks around in the jeep, so I figured everybody does." Then I got the idea to end all ideas. I said, "Come on. I'll drive you over to the Garcias' and you can get your suit there. Then we'll go swimming."

Nela looked at me like I was crazy. I was going to tell her that I bet she'd look superb in a bathing suit, but it seemed unnecessary. "You mean," she said, "we just walk up to my uncle and say, 'Pardon us, but we are going swimming?'"

"Yes. What's so nutty about that?"

She laughed. "I don't know. I do not think he will approve."

"Bet me," I said. "Come on."

5.

I pulled her by the hand and we

got into the jeep and after a while I remembered the way from the night before. We drove up to the Garcias' front door and the house boy came out and looked at us goggle-eyed. Then he turned and bolted inside while we got out of the jeep. By the time we got to the front door, old man Garcia was there to meet us.

"Ah," he said, smiling. "Special Agent Heath."

"We want to go swimming, Nela and I," I said to him. "Nela decided to stop off here for her suit. Is it all right?"

"You must think strange thoughts of the Filipinos, that you have to ask a question of that kind," Garcia said. "But of course it is all right. Personally, I am delighted. I had wondered if Nela would ever again begin to return to the outside world of her own true and complete volition. By all means, Nela, get your bathing suit. You know where to find it?"

She said, "Yes," a little breathlessly, looking first at me and then at Garcia. I wanted very badly to ask somebody what the hell was going on, but I tried to keep my face so it looked as if I had nothing else on my mind except going swimming.

Nela gave me another look and then headed for the stairs, and Garcia looked at me, smiling, and said, "Your face betrayed you, Mr. Heath."

"It did?"

"Yes. You looked as though you expected some other turn of developments."

"Maybe I did."

"What, for example?"

"I don't know. What you said last night about Nela not knowing what she wanted and not being allowed to leave the house and . . ."

"I never said she was not allowed." He turned toward the drawing room, and I followed him. "It is difficult perhaps for you to understand what she has gone through. She has lost her entire family."

"I know. She told me."

"She did?"

"Yes. Anything wrong with that?"

Garcia lit a cigarette. "Nothing. Of course, nothing is wrong. It is just that someone like myself must get accustomed to the concept of Nela communicating to such a degree with a relative stranger such as yourself." Garcia seated himself in a leather arm chair and crossed his legs and smiled up at me. "We have taken her away from the house, my wife and I, on several occasions. Several times to the country club—where, by the way, my membership privileges will entitle you to go swimming this afternoon."

"Thanks," I said.

He waved a deprecatory hand. "And several times to the city and once that I remember to Baguio in the mountains. It is very lovely

there. Very difficult to reach, but most assuredly worth the trip. Have you ever been to Baguio?"

"No," I said. "I'm dying to go. There, and Zamboanga."

"You have heard of Zamboanga?"

"Oh, certainly. There's a song, which I disremember."

"I know the song. It is very popular." He was still smiling. "May I offer you some brandy?"

"No, thank you."

"Any form of spirits?"

"How long do you think Nela will be?"

"It may take her a small amount of time."

"It took Wade and Rossiter some time too, when they left the room."

"I see you are still distrustful, Mr. Heath," Garcia said to me. "It is unfortunate."

"Most unfortunate."

"As I was saying, we took Nela to these several places, but each time it took a great deal of argument to urge her to accompany us. Preferentially, she prefers not to leave the house."

"She wants to leave it now."

"I am delighted."

"Also amazed?"

"Startled beyond words," Garcia said. "And pleased beyond words as well. You must believe me. Nela is entitled to a life of her own."

"Who took the shots at us when we left your house last night?"

"I beg your pardon?"

"Somebody was shooting at us. Didn't you hear the noise?"

"Jeeps make such noises of their own accord," Garcia said. "We hardly pay them any notice. Are you sure that some one was shooting at you?"

"Yes, sir."

"No one was hurt?"

"No."

"Did you fire back?"

"How crazy are we supposed to be?"

"But why didn't you let me know?"

"Slipped our minds. We were going sixty miles an hour just getting away from here."

"Ah. And did you notify the police?"

"Maybe I will have that brandy," I said. "Just one."

"I am delighted," Garcia said. "Do you wish to wait on the terrace? The view in the daytime is not displeasing."

I went out on the terrace and took a look at the bay. The terrace was angled to the front of the house, so that you could see part of the driveway, but not the front door itself, and, to the other side, the area where visitors' cars were parked. The house boy came with the brandy, and I took a healthy swat at it and looked and saw my jeep, stenciled CID — MANILA POLICE DEPARTMENT. The house boy must have parked it for me. I had another swig at the brandy and looked again and saw two jeeps in the parking area, both stenciled CID — MANILA

POLICE DEPARTMENT.

"Powerful stuff," I said to Garcia.

"Are you enjoying the view?"

"I'm not sure."

Garcia said, "You can be misleading in your conversation, Mr. Heath."

"So can you, Mr. Garcia."

"I believe Nela is ready," he said. "You have no idea how pleased I am that you are leaving with her for the . . ."

"I know exactly how pleased you are," I said. "But we're not leaving."

"I do not follow you."

"I'm going to follow you."

He looked at me.

"Take me to Will Beatty," I said. "Do it now."

Garcia shook his head in puzzlement. Then he said, "Ah, the brandy."

"Unprint the brandy," I said. "All right. Then let's do it this way." I took the gun from my pocket. "Take me to Beatty."

He looked at the gun. "You had better put that back in your pocket," he said. "I take it you admire Nela, my niece. You will upset her if she sees you with a gun."

"Where's Beatty?"

"The sight of guns has a completely unnerving effect upon Nela," Garcia said. "I beg you to consider this before taking your foolishness to any more distant extremes."

"There are two CID jeeps out there in your parking lot," I said. "One's mine. The other is my so-

called foolishness."

"You think it belongs to Special Agent Beatty?"

"Yes," I said, "I think it belongs to Special Agent Beatty."

Nela came out onto the terrace. She had her bathing suit and a folded towel.

"Move over to the side of the room," I said to her. "I was ready to snap my wig, trying to figure why this guy was so willing for you to leave with me. Then I figured it out. The brandy cleared my head."

"Nela," Garcia said to her, "speak reason to this American. He mentioned last night that despite a lack of family, he was eligible for discharge. He was eligible because of the considerable combat he had seen. Obviously, it has disturbed his mind." He smiled at me, uncertainly. "I understand, Mr. Heath. I understand perfectly. Please believe me, I . . ."

"Nela," I said. "Come here. No, walk around him. Walk *wide* around him. Now come here."

She did as I told her to do, and that, in itself, was the reassurance I had to have in that moment.

"Now," I said, when she was beside me, "look out there to your left. How many jeeps do you see with the letters CID? The ones that say MANILA POLICE DEPARTMENT."

Nela looked. She said, "Two."

I said to Garcia, "How many do you see?"

"You will have to put that gun

away, Mr. Heath," Garcia said. "You are a guest in my home."

"You going to take me to Beatty?"

"For a man whose chief concern is getting back to Chicago," Garcia said to me, "you invite trouble, Mr. Heath. What can I do to persuade you?"

"Nothing."

"An air priority to San Francisco?"

"No."

"A plane leaving at midnight tonight?"

"I knew it was going to happen," I said.

"I beg your pardon?" Garcia said. "Please put that gun away."

"You start with a murder," I said, "and you end up on a paper hunt. No matter which way you go at it, this is the way it happens."

"I fail to understand you," Garcia said. "Meanwhile, the gun is making everyone nervous."

"Beatty's here," I said to him. "And that accounts for why you were willing to have Nela go swimming with me. Just to get me out of the house."

"Fantastic," Garcia hissed. "In one more minute I shall call the house boy."

"Take me to Will Beatty," I said to him. "And do it now. Please. Don't worry about getting killed. I wouldn't shoot to kill. Believe me. I'd shoot for your hand, or the shoulder, perhaps, just to make it very painful so you knew I meant

business. Do I have to do that?"

"Mr. Heath," Garcia said to me, "I beg of you to listen to . . ."

"Then the second shot is in the area of the hips," I said, "close to the spine. That assumes that my aim is proper. You'll live through that too, but the odds are fifty-fifty you never walk again. With the medical care you can get in Manila nowadays, make it sixty-forty. No, you probably have connections with an eminent surgeon. For you, it's fifty-fifty. For everybody else, sixty-forty, but for you . . ."

"I will take you to Beatty," Garcia said.

"Don't call any house boys on your way."

"Put the gun away," he said.

"I don't feel like putting the gun away."

"It will attract attention."

"That chance I'll take."

Nela said to me, "Al . . ."

The sound of it, my first name, coming from her, made me turn and almost forget, but I swung back on Garcia before he could move forward.

"Keep pointing the gun at him," she said.

I nodded. "You heard the lady," I said to Garcia.

"There is a simple explanation to all of this," Garcia said. "It will cause you embarrassment in official circles."

"In the hand first," I said.

"I will take you to Beatty," he said. "Upon my word of honor, I

will take you to Beatty. But you must first put away your gun. Put it there, on the table." He looked at me narrowly, with calculation. "Place—the—gun—down."

I shot him in the hand.

His arm jerked and he looked at the hand, unbelievably at first. The sweat stood out on his forehead. He said in a choked voice, "I am prepared to die like a gentleman."

"Can it," I said. "Nobody's going to die. That only happens in case of strict emergency, or maybe accident. Now, next, the shoulder. Not the shoulder of the arm that's got the hand that got hit. The other shoulder."

"Come with me," Garcia said. "We will go to Mr. Beatty."

One hand holding the other, Garcia moved on out into the hall. I said to Nela, "Stay here. Get out of the way of anything." Then I followed him, pointing the gun at his back.

6.

At the back of the ornate stairway in the main hall was a door leading to a matching stairway that went not up but down. None of the wooden houses in the Philippines had cellars, but many of the stone and stucco and cement structures did, and this was one of them.

"I must tell you, Mr. Heath," Garcia said, moving down the stairs, "that . . ."

"Don't use my name," I said. "Don't talk. Don't say anything."

"As you . . ."

"Shut up."

"You don't . . ."

"I'll shoot you in the shoulder. So help me I'll shoot you in the shoulder."

"The sound of the shot will . . ."

"The sound will do the same thing it did upstairs. Nothing more, nothing less. Notice how quietly I talk, Mr. Garcia. See? Keep going. Where is it? That door in there?"

"Mr. Heath," Garcia said, "you..."

I shot him in the shoulder, and he gave a cry and fell forward onto his side.

I moved past him, slapping him on the hip and the side to see if he had a gun. I went down the stairs and there was an oaken door in front of me. I kicked it open with my foot, moving to the side at the same time. A shot sounded and a bullet spanked into the bannister of the cellar stairs behind me.

Inside the room, there was one overhead light, and I could see nothing except two exaggerated black shadows, shadows that included the outline of a gun. There were two figures etched against the wall.

"Will?" I called. "It's the Marines."

Beatty's voice said, "Stay out! It's all right if you stay out!"

"Who's with you?"

"Wade. He's got a gun."

"Do what he said, Heath,"

Wade's voice said. "Stay outside the door."

"What happens if I do?"

"We talk for a little while, till my buddy gets here."

"What makes you think he's coming?"

"What makes you think he's not?"

"Lieutenant Colonel Wade's in trouble," Beatty called. "Isn't that right, sir?"

"I got the gun," Wade said. "You keep your face shut."

Beatty's voice said, "Al? What was the shooting outside the door?"

"The old man."

"He shoot at you?"

"I shot at him. He's right here. Wounded."

"How'd you know I was here?"

"Saw your jeep."

Wade swore at him.

"He's a stickup artist, him and Rossiter," Beatty said. "They're both enlisted men. Went AWOL when their outfit moved north to Okinawa. Hung around here holding up stores and restaurants, and pretty soon they gave themselves titles. That right, Wade?"

"Depends," Wade said in his flat southwest twang. "Depends on how much trouble you think I'm in."

"I think you're in quite a bit of trouble," Beatty said.

"Well," Wade said, "if I'm in that much trouble, an extra shooting on my record ain't going to make a hell of a lot of difference."

"Easy, mate," Beatty said to him.

"On the other hand," Wade said, "maybe we can work something out."

"First they both decided to be captains," Beatty said to me, "and then they figured why not move up in rank a notch or two. They had a little money and they were charming companions. Then they met Garcia, and it turned out he was the hottest black market bloke in Manila."

Behind me on the floor, Garcia groaned, and I turned and looked down at him and said, "Do you want a doctor?"

"Yes, if you please."

"Soon as we get this straightened out," I said to him.

"I wish also my lawyer," he said.

"Then when the war was over," Beatty called out to me, "they started dealing in the most precious commodity in the world—travel priorities. They've got 'em stacked in here, some blank, others already filled out. Damndest sight you ever saw."

"We never falsified any orders," Wade said. "We never rigged anybody's papers."

"Except your own," Beatty said to him. "Lieutenant Colonel, sir."

I said, "How'd they get along with Garcia?" It was an idle question. I was trying to think what was going to happen next, and where Rossiter would show up—whether the stairs I had come down were the only stairs. The lone electric bulb in this part of the cellar

threw more shadow than light.

"Not so hot," Beatty called back. "They were putting the screws to him. Wade here got together with Wing the chauffeur, and Wing knew all the family secrets."

Then the thought came to me, and I said, "Hey, Wade?"

"Stay outside," he said, "or so help me! What is it?"

"Why do you think Garcia invited us out here last night?"

"I got my ideas," he said.

"Me too," I said. "Can Rossiter work alone without you?"

"That bastard," Wade said. "Where is he?"

"Is he any good alone?"

"He thinks so. But he's not."

"He couldn't even make lieutenant colonel," Beatty said. "All he was was a major."

Wade laughed, a short hoarse laugh. "He's a punk on his own," he said.

"So it was you Garcia was worried about?"

"Damn right," Wade said. "He even had it set to fix me up with the girl if I'd get off his back."

"And you'd have taken her and stayed right on his back anyway?"

"Probably."

"But he had something on you too. It was even."

"Like hell it was," Wade said. "He had something on Colonel Wade, but I'm no colonel. He didn't know the leaf was phony."

"But he *thought* he had something on you."

"Yeah, and he couldn't understand it. We kept telling him cut it more our way or we'd turn him in. We had him bent double."

"You know what I think?" I said. "I think Garcia invited Beatty and me out here last night so we could get a look at your face."

"I know," Wade said. "That lousy picture."

"Ever ask yourself how Garcia knew we'd seen the picture?"

"What does that mean?"

"The picture was in Wing's wallet. How'd Garcia know that?"

Behind me, on the floor, Joachim Garcia said, "I have the right to be put in contact with my lawyer."

"Two birds with one rock," I said. "Garcia kills the chauffeur or maybe has him killed, and plants the picture. He's real sharp. He even leaves the wallet a little ways from the body, like it was dropped by mistake, because no Chinese in Manila ever dies with his wallet on. Then he finds out the cops on the case and has them out to his house. Gives them the story about the chauffeur being marked for death, but meanwhile they get a real good look at you. So the two men—you and the chauffeur—all of a sudden, neither one's going to hurt him any more."

"Wait!" It was the voice of Garcia behind me. He had come to a half-sitting position. "Colonel Wade?"

"There he is now," Wade said in a deadly voice. "You think you're

shot up now, boy, ain't nothing to what you're going to be like. About one minute I'm coming out after you."

"Listen," Garcia croaked. "Heath lies. Do you hear me? Heath is a liar."

"Maybe," Wade said, but there was no concession in his voice.

"He wounded me because I tried to warn you of his presence," Garcia said. "Would I have done that under the circumstances he describes?"

"Sure you would," I said to him. "If I walk into that room, I not only find Wade, but I also find all your paper work. I walk in that room, you're gone. There's enough evidence in there to put you away till after the race track opens again. You weren't protecting Wade. You were protecting yourself. You probably did the same thing with Beatty."

"Righto," Beatty called. "Wade jumped me."

Garcia lowered himself achingly to the floor once more and mumbled something about his lawyer.

"All right," Wade said. "What about it?"

I said, "What about what?"

"We going to work something out?"

"Where's Rossiter?"

"I don't know. He's supposed to be down here."

I said, "I'd like it better if I knew where he was."

"The hell with Rossiter," Wade

said. "I'll make you a deal. Travel papers home for the both of you, and give me twenty-four hours. How does that sound?"

"No good."

"Why not?"

"Hell," I said. "Suppose I make an arrest and then take the travel papers anyway? I might be that kind of a fella. You're making no deal at all."

"I still got a gun on your friend."

"You won't use it."

"What makes you think so?"

"You're too smart."

"Am I as smart as you?"

"I don't know yet."

"Because," Wade said in a grating voice, "you had a gun and you shot Garcia." He raised his voice. "Ain't that right, Joachim?"

"First in the hand," Garcia said weakly. "Then—the shoulder."

"You hear that, Beatty?" Wade said.

"All right," I said, "the hell with it. I'm coming in there." I pulled my shoulder back and it hit against shelving along the wall by the door. The shelves were lined with bottles of American whiskey.

I put my gun in my left hand, took a pint bottle of five-star brandy from the shelf, and threw it through the open door. Wade said something, unintelligible, startled, and I turned the corner and saw that Beatty had leaped for him. Wade rolled away from him and pulled down a heavy table covered with mimeographed sheets of pa-

per, and from behind the table he took a shot at me and I rolled too.

It was the kind of inconclusive, unpredictable gun fight you never see in the movies. Nobody got hit. And it was over almost at once, because there were three Filipino cops standing in the doorway, and I take back anything I ever said about the Manila Police.

Wade threw his gun on the floor and stood up, and a short, swarthy man in civilian clothes came into the room and said, "Ah. The matchless Special Agent Beatty."

"Hello, Inspector," Beatty said. "Pleased to see you here. This is Special Agent Heath. Al—Inspector Macalindung."

"My friend Joachim Garcia is lying on the floor outside," Macalindung said. "He seems in need of medical attention."

"It's a long story," I said.

"It generally is," Macalindung said. "I have spent the better part of a lifetime reading American detective fiction, simply for the purposes of entertainment." He looked around the room.

"Travel priority ring," Beatty said to him. "Garcia and the two Americans. The stuff is here."

"Ah," Macalindung said.

"We think Garcia killed Wing," I said. "Ask him."

Macalindung leaned out the door and looked down and said, "Did you?" Garcia mumbled something and Macalindung looked back at

us and said, "He desires his lawyer."

"I came out here just before noon," Beatty said. "Soon as I got the AWOL news on Wade and his friend."

"Yes," Macalindung said. "May we have first things first?"

"We're trying," I said to him.

"The first thing I desire to know," Macalindung said, "is the location of Lieutenant Colonel Wade's companion. Major Rossiter, I believe the name to be."

I pointed at Wade. "He wishes *he* knew."

"Rossiter seems allergic to gunfire," Macalindung said.

"Yellow is the word," Wade said to him, and we started up the stairs.

We got up to the main hall and one of the cops went to use the phone and call the doctor for Garcia. Then, coming down the stairs from the second floor, we saw Rossiter, with his arm around Dorothea Garcia. She was wearing a thin, purplish dressing robe.

"Well, damn," Wade said, at them. "Well, hot damn. Of all the times."

Rossiter said, "What's going on?"

"The ball game, Casanova," I said to him.

Wade said, "Damn it, are you deaf on top of everything else? Didn't you hear the shots?"

"You know me when I hear shots," Rossiter said.

Wade said, "Didn't it even worry you?"

"I figured it was you and Garcia. It was coming to that."

"Suppose it had been me and Garcia. Didn't you wonder who was going to win?"

"Why, no," Rossiter said. "Garcia's a lousy shot. He couldn't even hit the jeep when these boys drove off last night."

Inspector Macalindung said, "Ah."

Beatty said, "Rossiter never knew I was here. Or you, Al. He must have been upstairs all this time."

"He was supposed to be down in the cellar with me," Wade said. "Clearing the stuff away. We were in trouble and he knew it."

"I got held up," Rossiter said lamely. He looked at Dorothea Garcia, but she tightened the sash around her robe and drew herself up haughtily and said to Macalindung, "Inspector, am I being detained?"

"Not," Inspector Macalindung said, with infinite courtliness, "at the moment."

I went in the drawing room, and Nela was there, standing by the piano, looking small and frightened. It seemed the most natural thing for me to put my arms around her.

Inspector Macalindung came in the room and said, "Permit me to observe that despite happenings of almost an emergency nature, this seems an unusually romantic house-

hold. Do you not agree?"

"Never mind," I said to him. "You've got a murder and a priority market and two AWOLs broken for you all at one shot. Not to mention Garcia and the black market. All in all, a fair score for the Manila Police."

By all means," Macalindung said. "I foresee that you and Special Agent Beatty will receive all types of extraordinary commendations." He smiled and lit a cigarette. "It is delightful to contemplate. A perfect specimen."

I said, "Of what?"

"American detective fiction," Macalindung said. "It follows three patterns. One is the person in danger, known or unknown. The other is the element of the stranger in town. The third, and by far the most common, is the two detectives working together. You know the subject matter to which I allude. Sherlock Holmes and his Watson. Perry Mason and his Della Street. The Lone Ranger . . ."

"Okay," I said. "Which one of us is Tonto? Beatty or me?"

"Unfortunately," Macalindung said, "you depart from the tradition somewhat, the two of you. You are both somewhat foolhardy and thoughtless. May I ask why you came here today? I already know that Special Agent Beatty came because of information he had gathered as to the two prisoners. But you, Mr. Heath?"

"It's a long story."

"Ah, yes."

"I was going to take Nela swimming," I said. "She stopped off here for her suit."

"That sounds like an honest report," Inspector Macalindung said. "But so long as it is your purpose, you and Special Agent Beatty, to improve the Manila Police Department, permit me to suggest that henceforth you leave some word as where you intend to be. So the others of us can find you, if the need arises."

I looked at him. "You didn't know?"

"How was I to know?"

"You mean you had to piece it together? You had to guess?"

"Do not," Macalindung said, raising his hand, "impart to me the inevitable genius of your fictional detectives. I am here because this young lady . . ." he nodded toward Nela "... called the police. Did you think she would not? How else do you believe I should have learned?"

Of course she called the police. Naturally she called the police. What else would have . . .

"I had presumed," Inspector Macalindung said, "that this was why you embraced the young lady

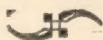
so thoroughly just this past moment in my presence. In sheer gratitude. Perhaps I was mistaken . . ."

He is out of jail some six years by now. And you might think that if Harry Rossiter had not changed his ways by now, then at least he would have changed his name. But look at the charge against him. Expediting license applications for restaurants, night clubs, and the sale of liquor. Charges arising first from the complaint of a man in the Chicago license bureau who thought Rossiter was paying too much attention to his wife . . .

No, it will not take long, the questioning. Perhaps all it will take will be for Rossiter to get one good look at me, and then he will remember that incident in Manila and there will be no trouble.

The rain continues, and once again tonight I shall miss my supper. It will be a successful assignment, though, as detective assignments go, thanks to memory as the most useful agent of all.

And when I tell Nela why I am late, good wife that she is, she will understand.



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